MARVEL

EPIC COLLECTION

ROM

THE ORIGINAL MARVEL YEARS

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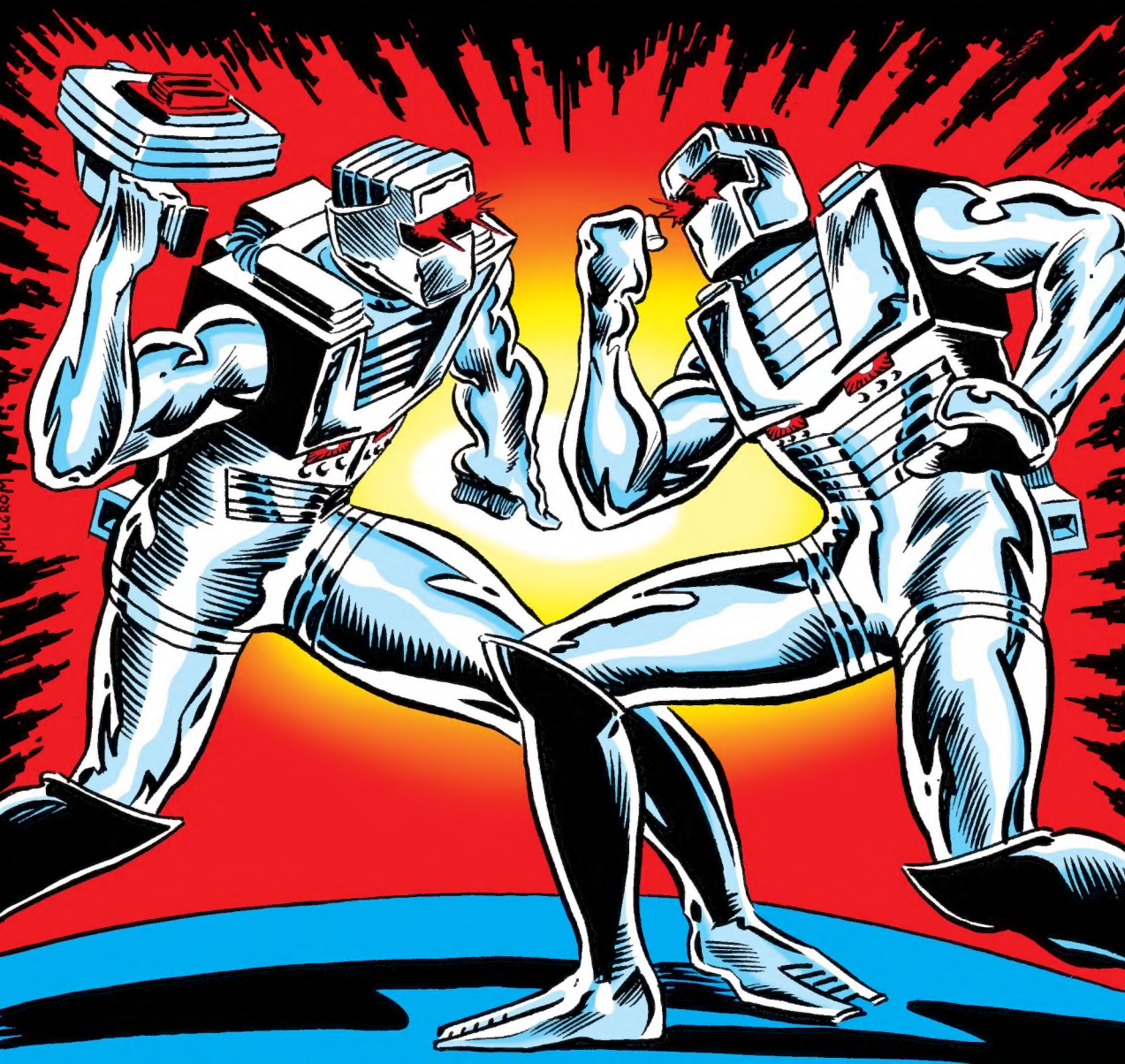

EPIC COLLECTION

ROM

THE ORIGINAL MARVEL YEARS

VOLUME 2

1981-1982

ROM #21-33 & ANNUAL #1 AND *POWER MAN AND IRON FIST #73*

EPIC COLLECTION

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ROM #21, AUGUST 1981
4 "MOVE OVER ROM — THERE'S A NEW HERO IN TOWN!"
21 "TROUBLE IN PARADISE!"

ROM #22, SEPTEMBER 1981
26 "WELCOME, ONE AND ALL, TO THE GREAT ROCKETEERS REVIVAL!"
43 "THE BODY SNATCHER!"

48 *POWER MAN AND IRON FIST #73,* SEPTEMBER 1981
"WRAITH, COLOR OR CREED"

71 *ROM #23,* OCTOBER 1981
"THE THING FROM OUTER SPACE!"

93 *ROM #24,* NOVEMBER 1981
"NO PLACE LIKE HOME!"

ROM #25, DECEMBER 1981
115 "GALADOR!"
137 "LOVE WILL TEAR US APART"

154 *ROM #26,* JANUARY 1982
"GALACTUS!"

176 *ROM #27,* FEBRUARY 1982
"TURNABOUT IS FAIR PLAY!"

198 *ROM #28,* MARCH 1982
"EARTHWARD BOUND!"

221 *ROM #29,* APRIL 1982
"EVEN A SPACEKNIGHT CAN CRY!"

244 *ROM #30,* MAY 1982
"SILVER SPIDERS IN THE SNOW!"

267 *ROM #31,* JUNE 1982
"WEST VIRGINIA REEL"

290 *ROM #32,* JULY 1982
"CHOOSING SIDES!"

ROM ANNUAL #1, 1982
313 "IT CAME FROM BEYOND THE STARS"
348 "TRAITOR!"

354 *ROM #33,* AUGUST 1982
"MINE EYES HAVE SEEN THE GLORY…"

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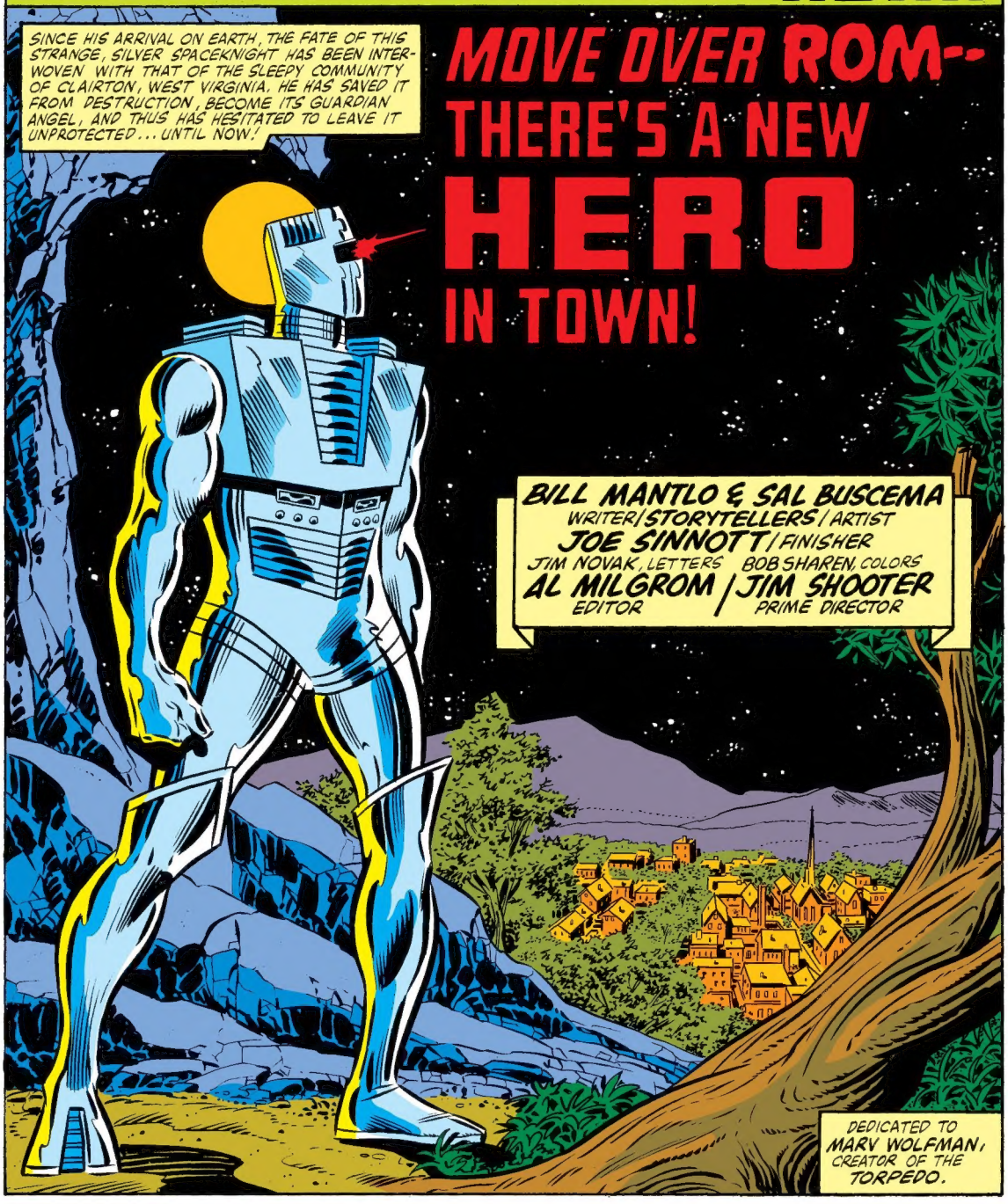
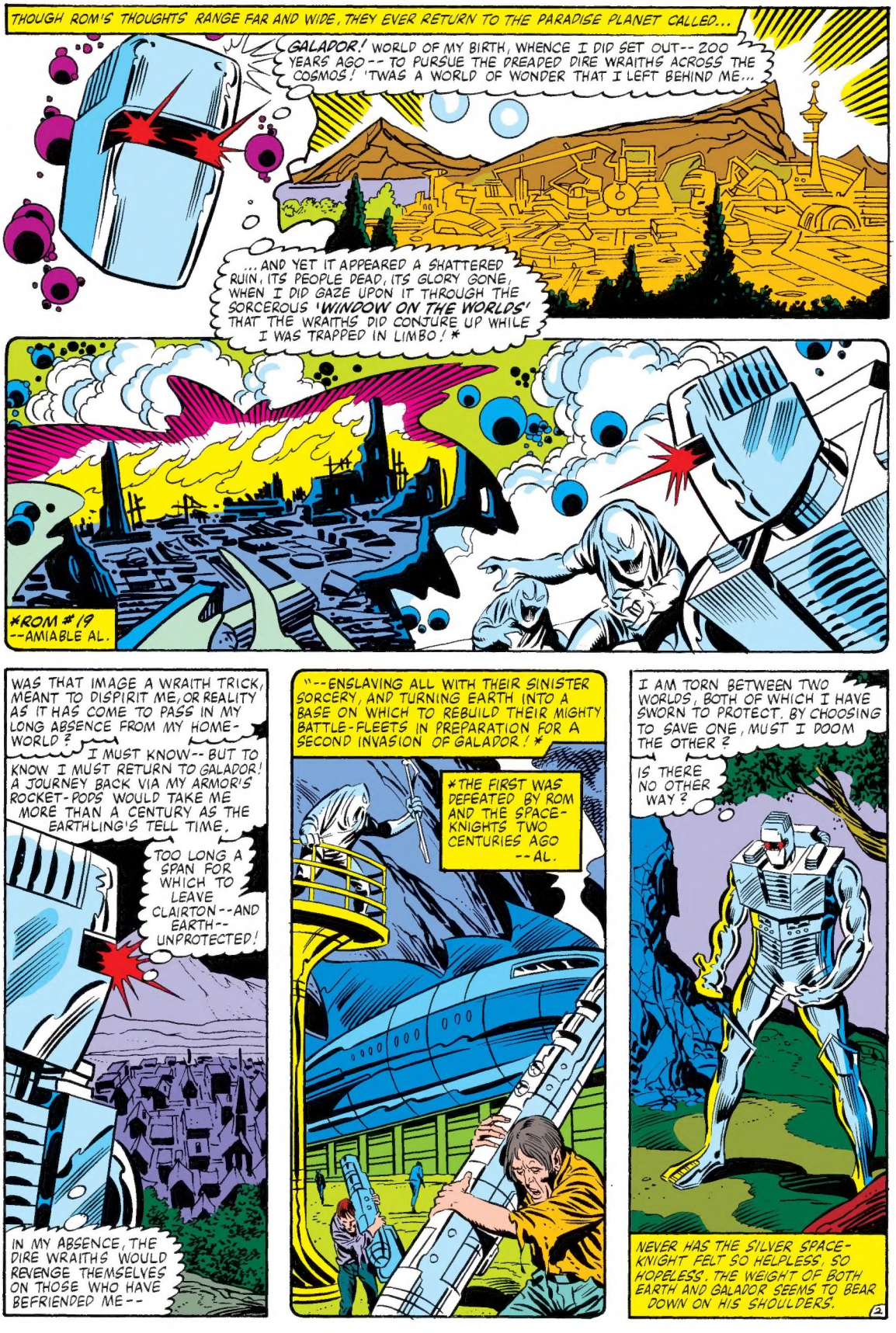
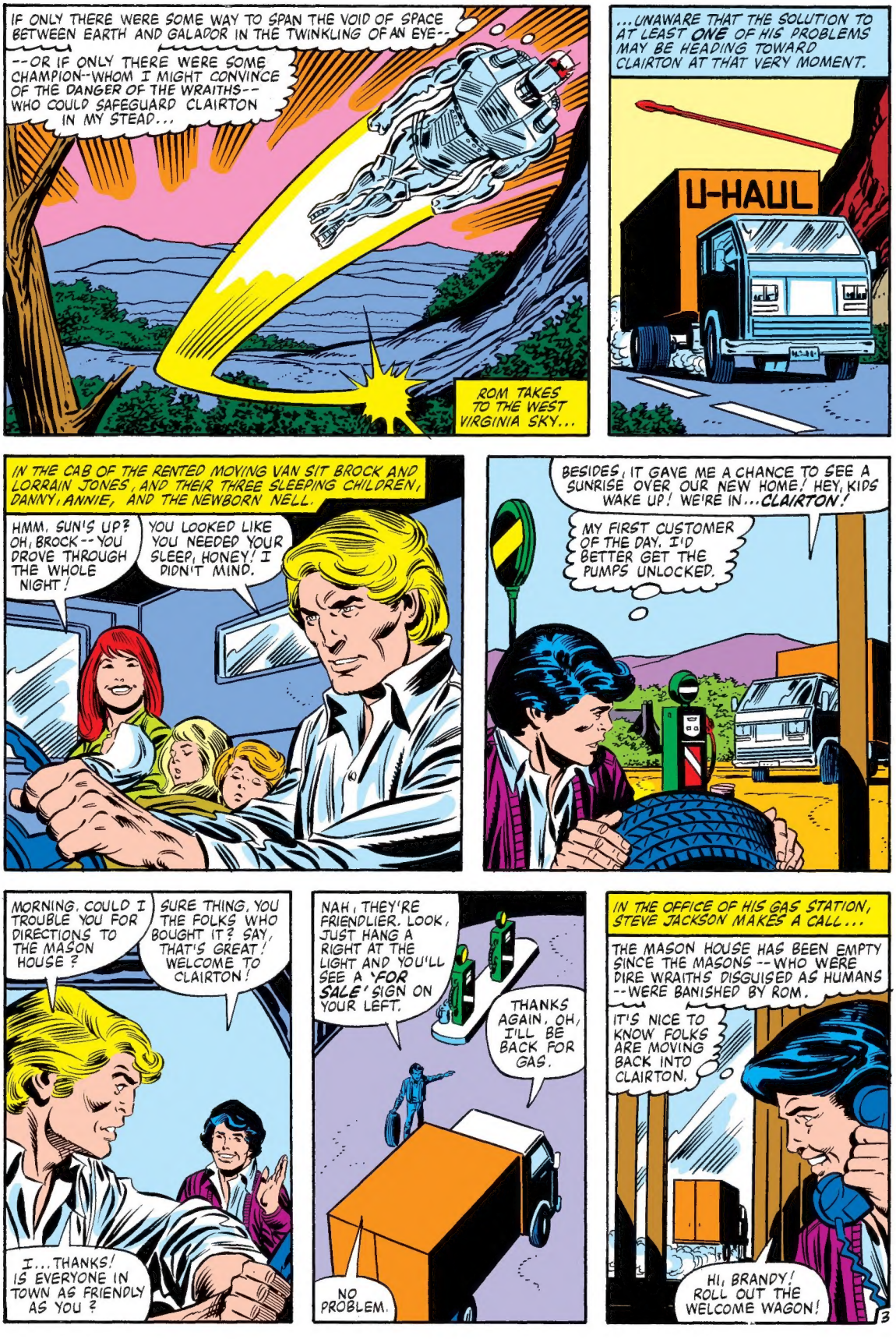
MOVE OVER,
ROM,™
THERE'S A NEW HERO IN TOWN!
THE RETURN OF THE TORPEDO!

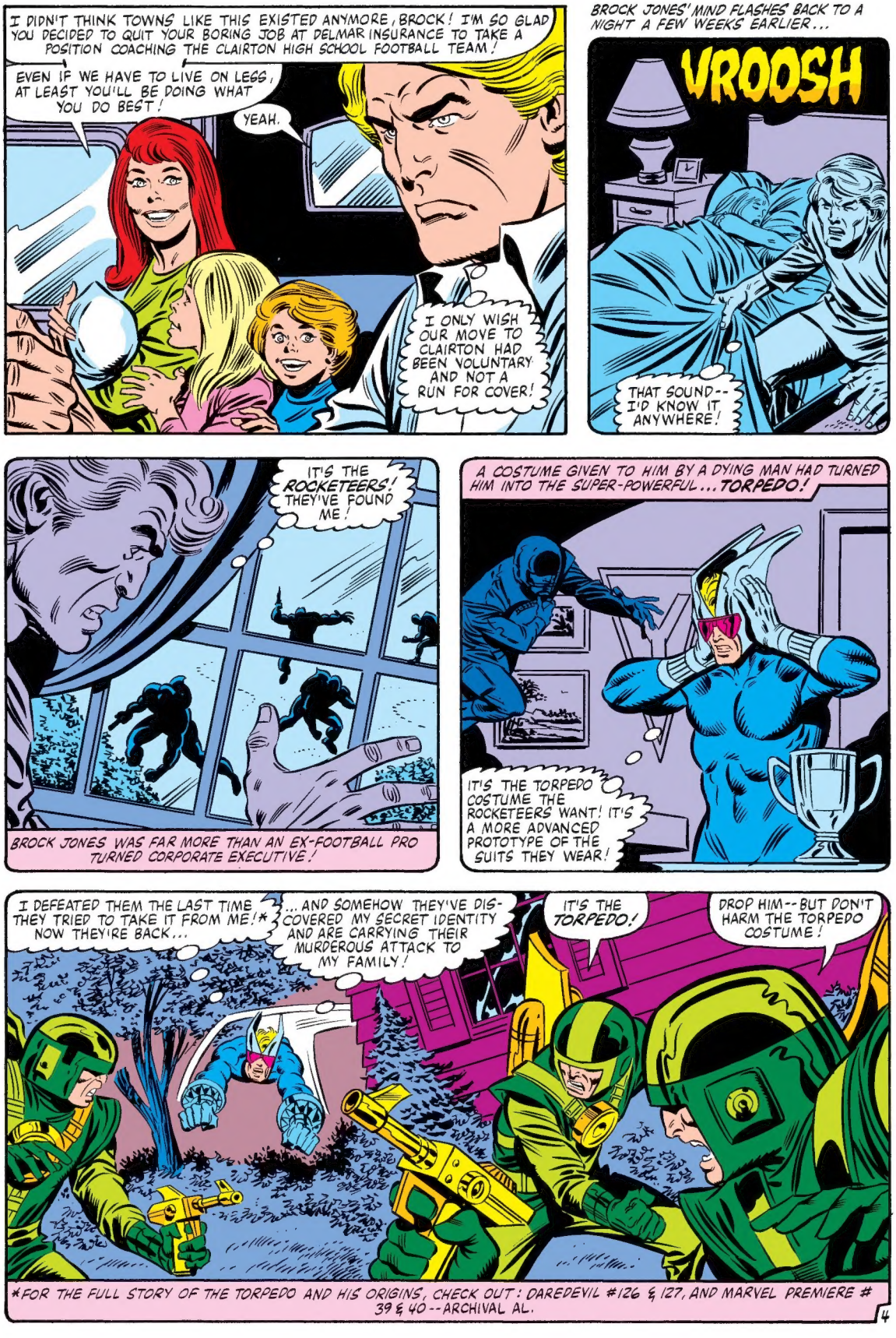
Two-hundred years ago, the evil Dire Wraiths threatened the peace-loving planet, Galador. In their homeworld's darkest hour, a thousand brave, young Galadorians sacrificed humanity itself to become Cyborg Warriors, a last desperate line of defense. Though hopelessly outnumbered, these Spaceknights triumphed, and pursued the remnants of the Wraith horde across the universe. Now, alone in the Enemy's mightiest stronghold, on a backward planet called Earth, one Galadorian Warrior faces his most awesome challenge.

STAN LEE PRESENTS: THE GREATEST OF THE SPACEKNIGHTS--ROM!


SINCE HIS ARRIVAL ON EARTH, THE FATE OF THIS STRANGE, SILVER SPACEKNIGHT HAS BEEN INTER-WOVEN WITH THAT OF THE SLEEPY COMMUNITY OF CLAIRTON, WEST VIRGINIA. HE HAS SAVED IT FROM DESTRUCTION, BECOME ITS GUARDIAN ANGEL, AND THUS HAS HESITATED TO LEAVE IT UNPROTECTED... UNTIL NOW!
MOVE OVER ROM-- THERE'S A NEW HERO IN TOWN!
BILL MANTLO & SAL BUSCEMA
WRITER/STORYTELLERS/ARTIST
JOE SINNOTT/FINISHER
JIM NOVAK, LETTERS
BOB SHAREN, COLORS
AL MILGROM/JIM SHOOTER
EDITOR
PRIME DIRECTOR
DEDICATED TO MARV WOLFMAN, CREATOR OF THE TORPEDO.

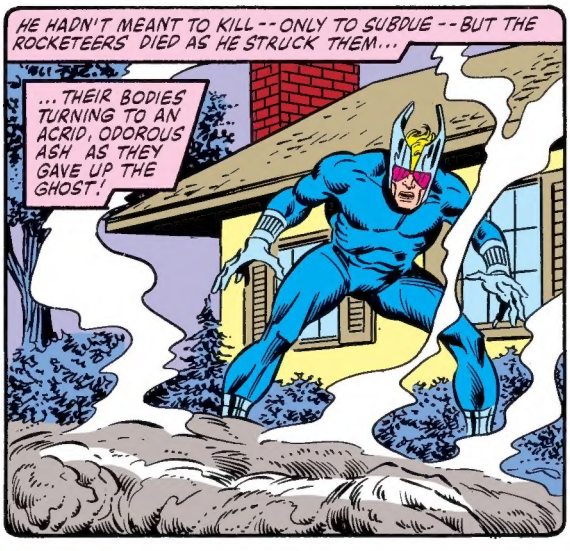

THOUGH ROM'S THOUGHTS RANGE FAR AND WIDE, THEY EVER RETURN TO THE PARADISE PLANET CALLED...
GALADOR! WORLD OF MY BIRTH, WHENCE I DID SET OUT-- 200 YEARS AGO-- TO PURSUE THE DREADED DIRE WRAITHS ACROSS THE COSMOS! 'TWAS A WORLD OF WONDER THAT I LEFT BEHIND ME...
...AND YET IT APPEARED A SHATTERED RUIN, ITS PEOPLE DEAD, ITS GLORY GONE, WHEN I DID GAZE UPON IT THROUGH THE SORCEROUS 'WINDOW ON THE WORLDS' THAT THE WRAITHS DID CONJURE UP WHILE I WAS TRAPPED IN LIMBO! *
*ROM #19 --AMIABLE AL.
WAS THAT IMAGE A WRAITH TRICK, MEANT TO DISPIRIT ME, OR REALITY AS IT HAS COME TO PASS IN MY LONG ABSENCE FROM MY HOME-WORLD?
I MUST KNOW-- BUT TO KNOW I MUST RETURN TO GALADOR! A JOURNEY BACK VIA MY ARMOR'S ROCKET-PODS WOULD TAKE ME MORE THAN A CENTURY AS THE EARTHLING'S TELL TIME.
TOO LONG A SPAN FOR WHICH TO LEAVE CLAIRTON--AND EARTH-- UNPROTECTED!
IN MY ABSENCE, THE DIRE WRAITHS WOULD REVENGE THEMSELVES ON THOSE WHO HAVE BEFRIENDED ME--
"--ENSLAVING ALL WITH THEIR SINISTER SORCERY, AND TURNING EARTH INTO A BASE ON WHICH TO REBUILD THEIR MIGHTY BATTLE-FLEETS IN PREPARATION FOR A SECOND INVASION OF GALADOR! *
*THE FIRST WAS DEFEATED BY ROM AND THE SPACE-KNIGHTS TWO CENTURIES AGO --AL.
I AM TORN BETWEEN TWO WORLDS, BOTH OF WHICH I HAVE SWORN TO PROTECT. BY CHOOSING TO SAVE ONE, MUST I DOOM THE OTHER?
IS THERE NO OTHER WAY?
NEVER HAS THE SILVER SPACE-KNIGHT FELT SO HELPLESS, SO HOPELESS. THE WEIGHT OF BOTH EARTH AND GALADOR SEEMS TO BEAR DOWN ON HIS SHOULDERS.
2

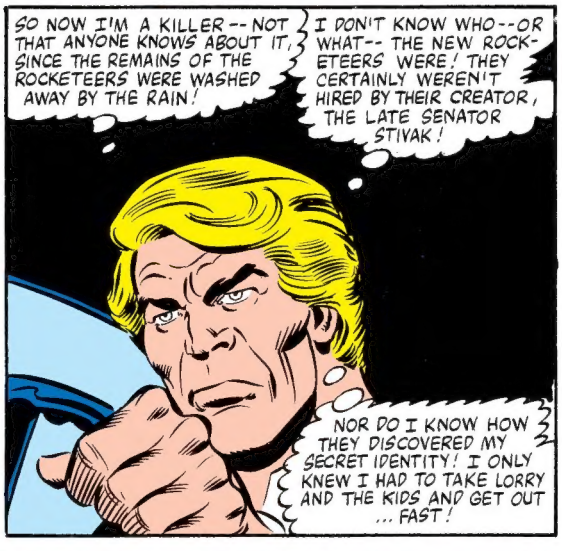

IF ONLY THERE WERE SOME WAY TO SPAN THE VOID OF SPACE BETWEEN EARTH AND GALADOR IN THE TWINKLING OF AN EYE--
--OR IF ONLY THERE WERE SOME CHAMPION--WHOM I MIGHT CONVINCE OF THE DANGER OF THE WRAITHS--WHO COULD SAFEGUARD CLAIRTON IN MY STEAD...
ROM TAKES TO THE WEST VIRGINIA SKY...
...UNAWARE THAT THE SOLUTION TO AT LEAST ONE OF HIS PROBLEMS MAY BE HEADING TOWARD CLAIRTON AT THAT VERY MOMENT.
U-HAUL
IN THE CAB OF THE RENTED MOVING VAN SIT BROCK AND LORRAIN JONES, AND THEIR THREE SLEEPING CHILDREN, DANNY, ANNIE, AND THE NEWBORN NELL.
HMM, SUN'S UP? OH, BROCK--YOU DROVE THROUGH THE WHOLE NIGHT!
YOU LOOKED LIKE YOU NEEDED YOUR SLEEP, HONEY! I DIDN'T MIND.
BESIDES, IT GAVE ME A CHANCE TO SEE A SUNRISE OVER OUR NEW HOME! HEY, KIDS WAKE UP! WE'RE IN...CLAIRTON!
MY FIRST CUSTOMER OF THE DAY. I'D BETTER GET THE PUMPS UNLOCKED.
MORNING. COULD I TROUBLE YOU FOR DIRECTIONS TO THE MASON HOUSE?
SURE THING. YOU THE FOLKS WHO BOUGHT IT? SAY, THAT'S GREAT! WELCOME TO CLAIRTON!
I...THANKS! IS EVERYONE IN TOWN AS FRIENDLY AS YOU?
NAH, THEY'RE FRIENDLIER. LOOK, JUST HANG A RIGHT AT THE LIGHT AND YOU'LL SEE A 'FOR SALE' SIGN ON YOUR LEFT.
THANKS AGAIN, OH, I'LL BE BACK FOR GAS.
NO PROBLEM.
IN THE OFFICE OF HIS GAS STATION, STEVE JACKSON MAKES A CALL...
THE MASON HOUSE HAS BEEN EMPTY SINCE THE MASONS--WHO WERE DIRE WRAITHS DISGUISED AS HUMANS--WERE BANISHED BY ROM.
IT'S NICE TO KNOW FOLKS ARE MOVING BACK INTO CLAIRTON.
HI, BRANDY! ROLL OUT THE WELCOME WAGON!
3

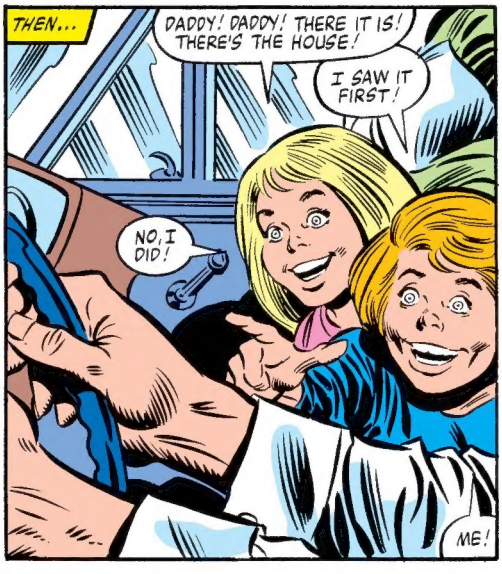

I DIDN'T THINK TOWNS LIKE THIS EXISTED ANYMORE, BROCK! I'M SO GLAD YOU DECIDED TO QUIT YOUR BORING JOB AT DELMAR INSURANCE TO TAKE A POSITION COACHING THE CLAIRTON HIGH SCHOOL FOOTBALL TEAM!
EVEN IF WE HAVE TO LIVE ON LEGS, AT LEAST YOU'LL BE DOING WHAT YOU DO BEST!
YEAH.
I ONLY WISH OUR MOVE TO CLAIRTON HAD BEEN VOLUNTARY AND NOT A RUN FOR COVER!
BROCK JONES' MIND FLASHES BACK TO A NIGHT A FEW WEEKS EARLIER...
VROOSH
THAT SOUND-- I'D KNOW IT ANYWHERE!
IT'S THE ROCKETEERS! THEY'VE FOUND ME!
BROCK JONES WAS FAR MORE THAN AN EX-FOOTBALL PRO TURNED CORPORATE EXECUTIVE!
A COSTUME GIVEN TO HIM BY A DYING MAN HAD TURNED HIM INTO THE SUPER-POWERFUL... TORPEDO!
IT'S THE TORPEDO COSTUME THE ROCKETEERS WANT! IT'S A MORE ADVANCED PROTOTYPE OF THE SUITS THEY WEAR!
I DEFEATED THEM THE LAST TIME THEY TRIED TO TAKE IT FROM ME!* NOW THEY'RE BACK...
...AND SOMEHOW THEY'VE DISCOVERED MY SECRET IDENTITY AND ARE CARRYING THEIR MURDEROUS ATTACK TO MY FAMILY!
IT'S THE TORPEDO!
DROP HIM-- BUT DON'T HARM THE TORPEDO COSTUME!
*FOR THE FULL STORY OF THE TORPEDO AND HIS ORIGINS, CHECK OUT: DAREDEVIL #126 & 127, AND MARVEL PREMIERE # 39 & 40 -- ARCHIVAL AL.
4

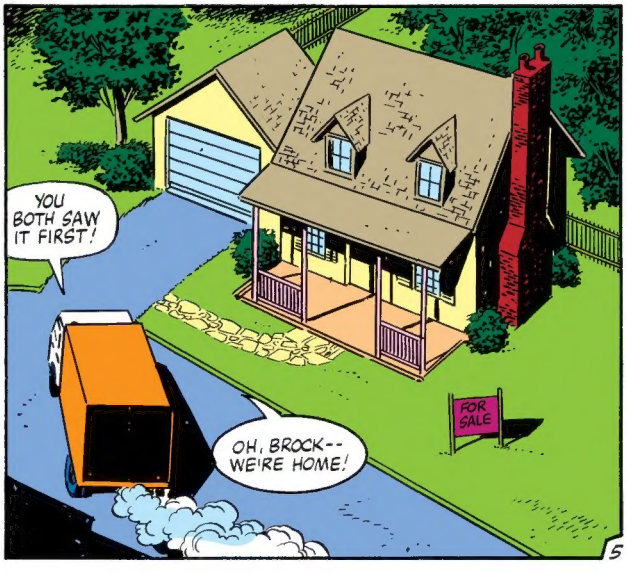
THE ROCKETEERS WERE WELL-ARMED AND FAST... BUT THEIR ROCKET-SUITS WERE NEVER ANY MATCH FOR THE TORPEDO!
I'M PLOWING THROUGH THEM LIKE A DEFENSIVE TACKLE THROUGH TISSUE PAPER!

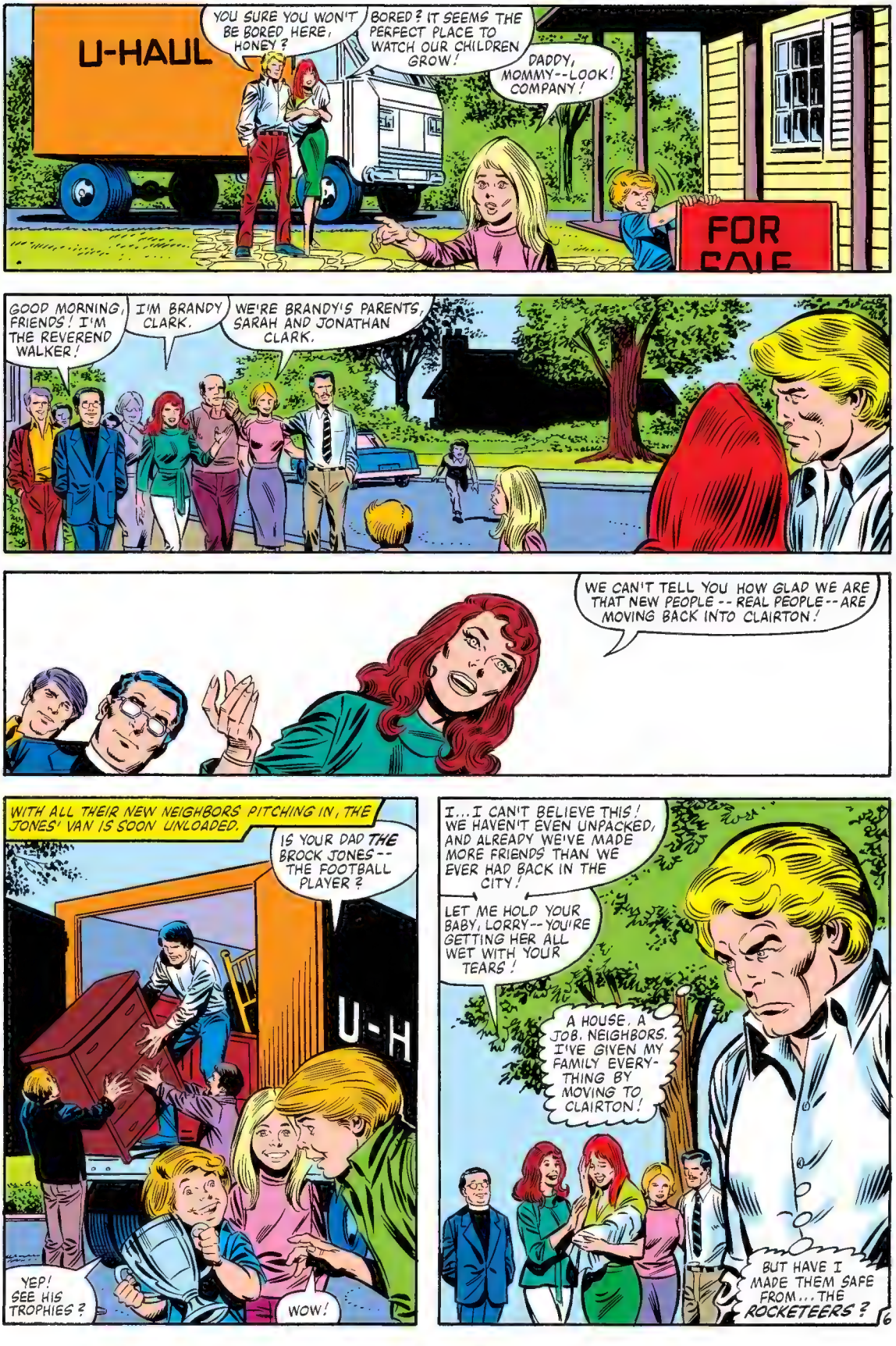
BUT I CAN'T LET THEM SCORE A SINGLE POINT -- NOT WHEN THE LIVES OF LORRY AND THE KIDS ARE AT STAKE!
THE TORPEDO HIT THEM WITH ALL THE POWER OF HIS COSTUME'S JET-PUNCH!

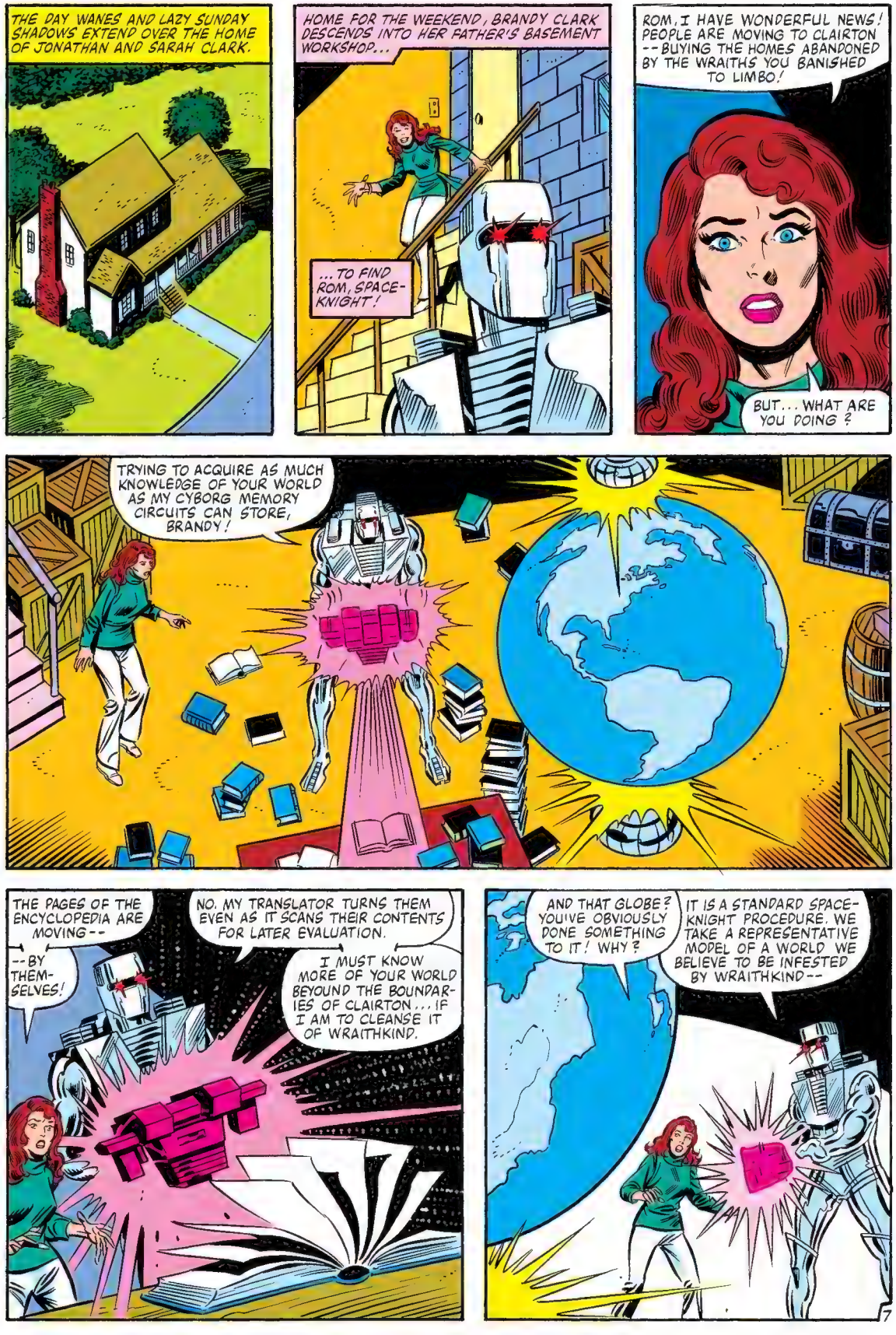

HE HADN'T MEANT TO KILL -- ONLY TO SUBDUE -- BUT THE ROCKETEERS DIED AS HE STRUCK THEM...
...THEIR BODIES TURNING TO AN ACRID, ODOROUS ASH AS THEY GAVE UP THE GHOST!

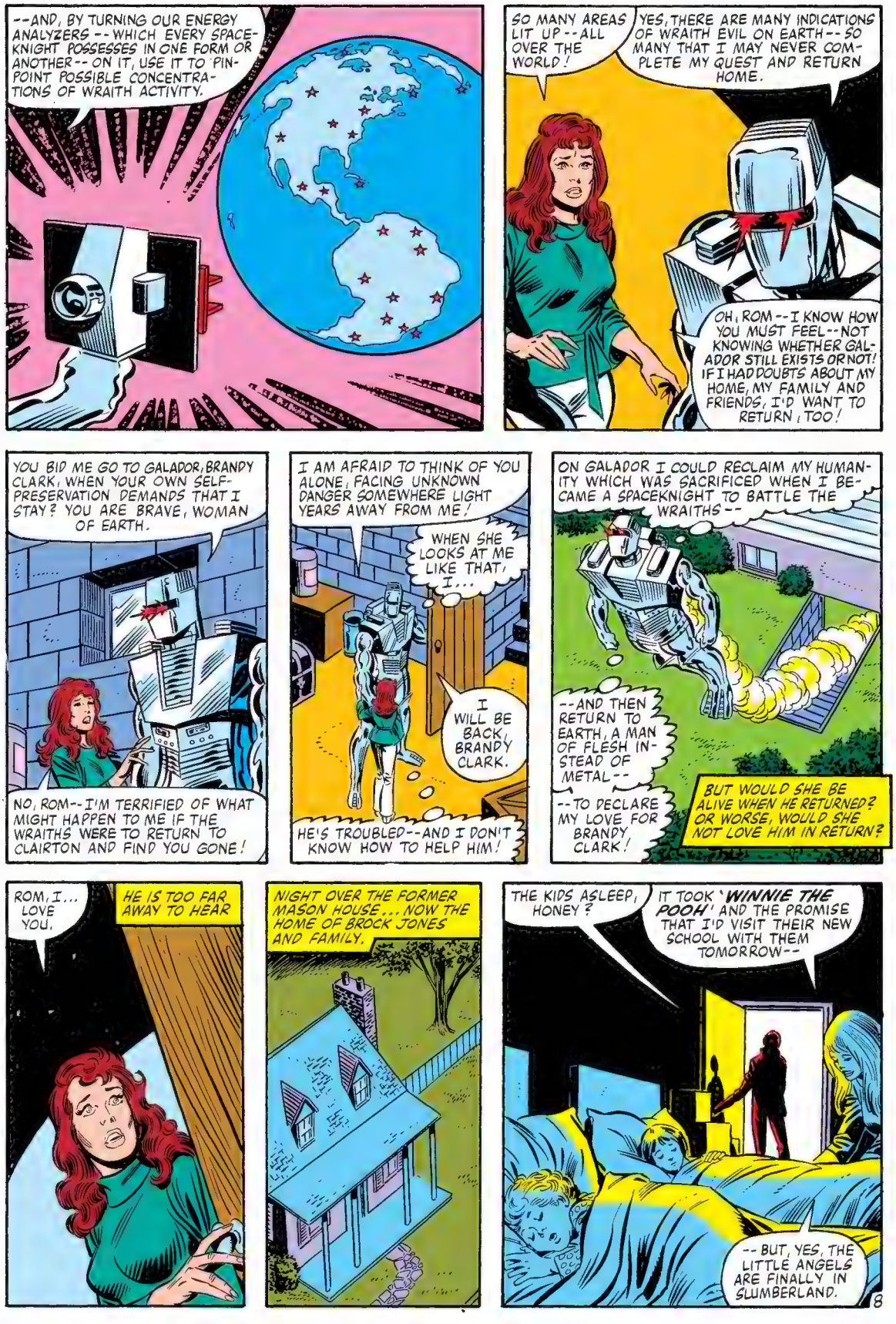

SO NOW I'M A KILLER -- NOT THAT ANYONE KNOWS ABOUT IT, SINCE THE REMAINS OF THE ROCKETEERS WERE WASHED AWAY BY THE RAIN!
I DON'T KNOW WHO -- OR WHAT -- THE NEW ROCKETEERS WERE! THEY CERTAINLY WEREN'T HIRED BY THEIR CREATOR, THE LATE SENATOR STIVAK!
NOR DO I KNOW HOW THEY DISCOVERED MY SECRET IDENTITY! I ONLY KNEW I HAD TO TAKE LORRY AND THE KIDS AND GET OUT ... FAST!

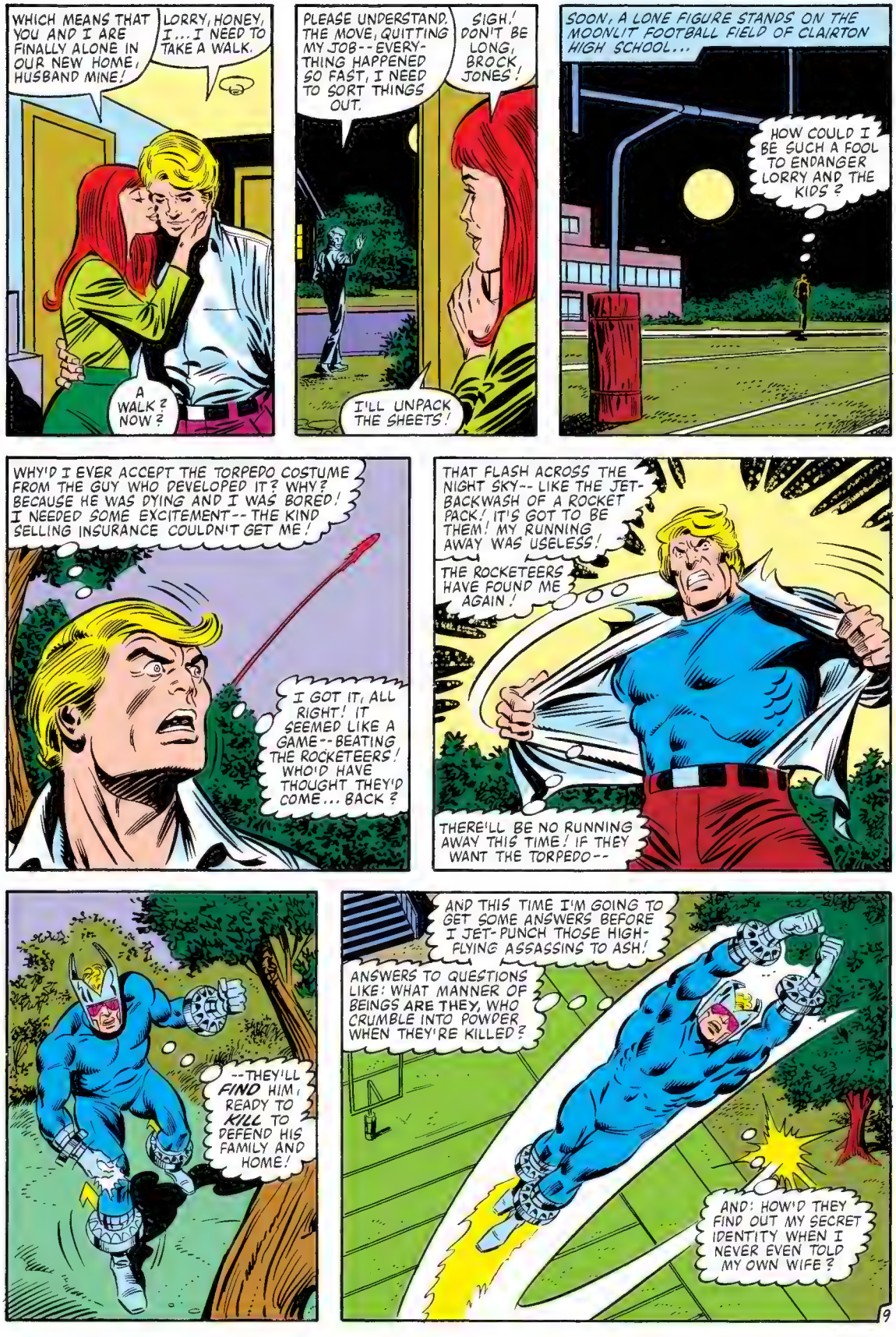

THEN...
DADDY! DADDY! THERE IT IS! THERE'S THE HOUSE!
I SAW IT FIRST!
NO, I DID!
ME!

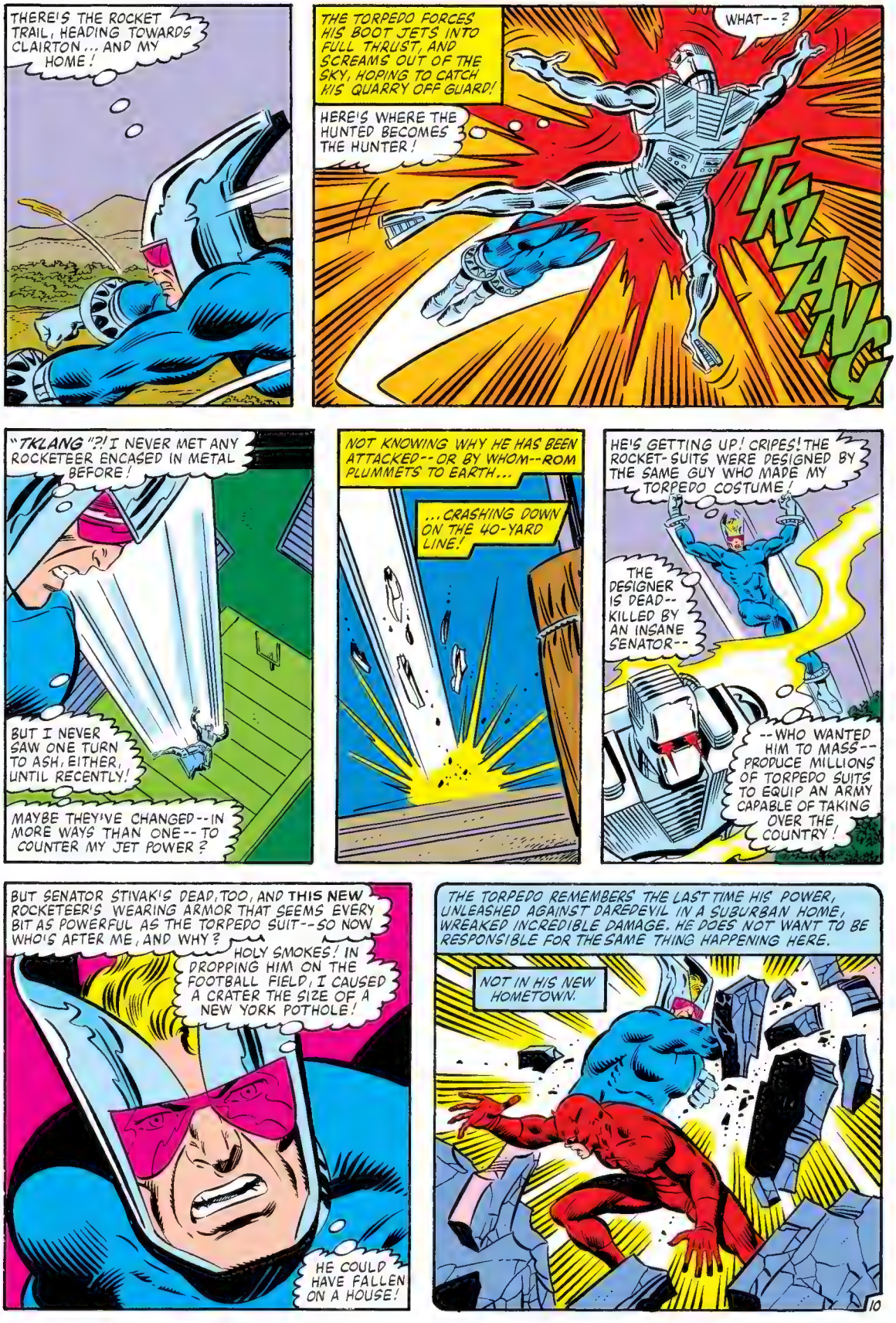

YOU BOTH SAW IT FIRST!
FOR SALE
OH, BROCK -- WE'RE HOME!
5

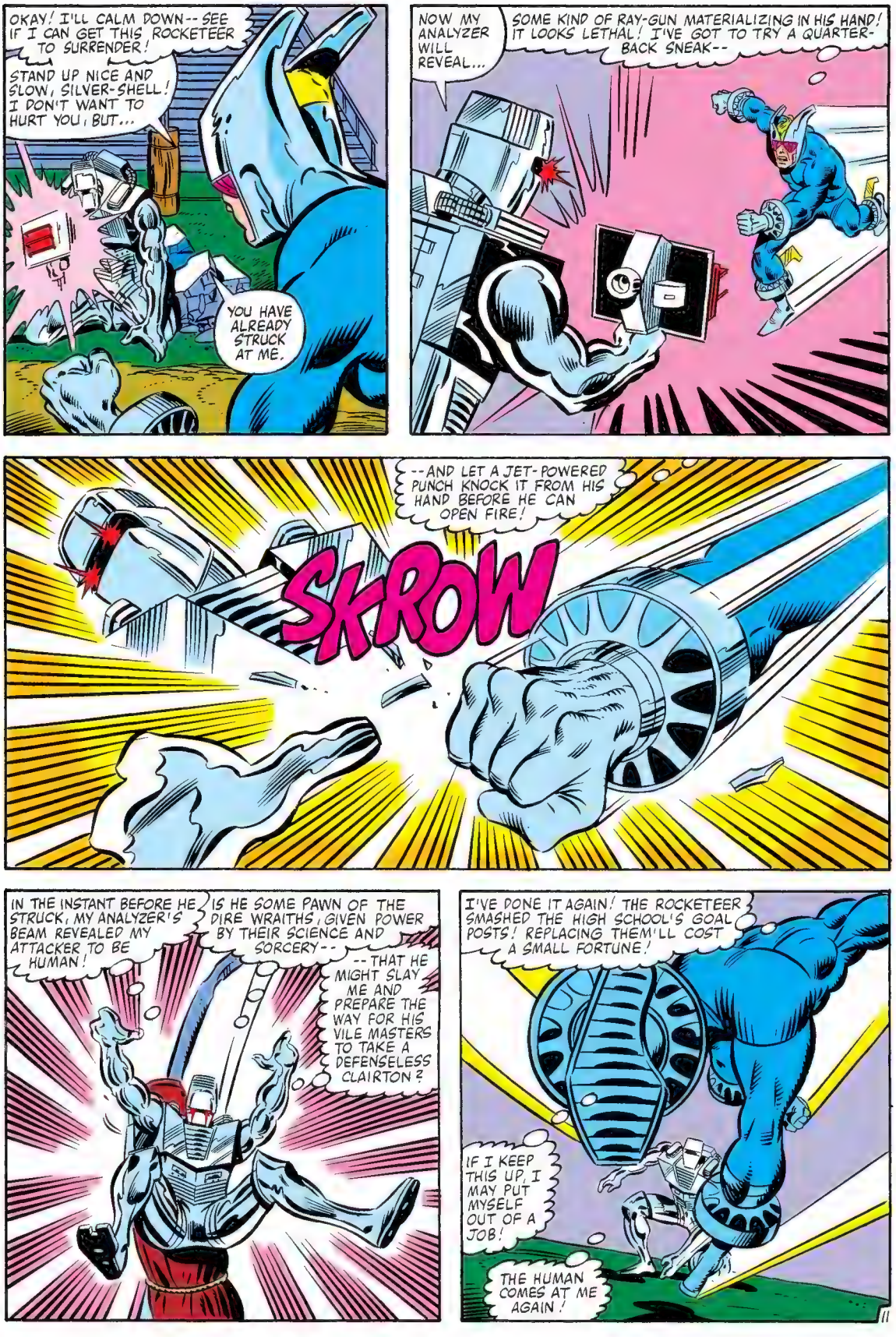

U-HAUL
YOU SURE YOU WON'T BE BORED HERE, HONEY?
BORED? IT SEEMS THE PERFECT PLACE TO WATCH OUR CHILDREN GROW!
DADDY, MOMMY--LOOK! COMPANY!
FOR
GOOD MORNING, FRIENDS! I'M THE REVEREND WALKER!
I'M BRANDY CLARK.
WE'RE BRANDY'S PARENTS, SARAH AND JONATHAN CLARK.
WE CAN'T TELL YOU HOW GLAD WE ARE THAT NEW PEOPLE -- REAL PEOPLE -- ARE MOVING BACK INTO CLAIRTON!
WITH ALL THEIR NEW NEIGHBORS PITCHING IN, THE JONES' VAN IS SOON UNLOADED.
IS YOUR DAD THE BROCK JONES -- THE FOOTBALL PLAYER?
U-H
YEP! SEE HIS TROPHIES?
WOW!
I... I CAN'T BELIEVE THIS! WE HAVEN'T EVEN UNPACKED, AND ALREADY WE'VE MADE MORE FRIENDS THAN WE EVER HAD BACK IN THE CITY!
LET ME HOLD YOUR BABY, LORRY -- YOU'RE GETTING HER ALL WET WITH YOUR TEARS!
A HOUSE, A JOB, NEIGHBORS. I'VE GIVEN MY FAMILY EVERYTHING BY MOVING TO CLAIRTON!
BUT HAVE I MADE THEM SAFE FROM... THE ROCKETEERS?
6

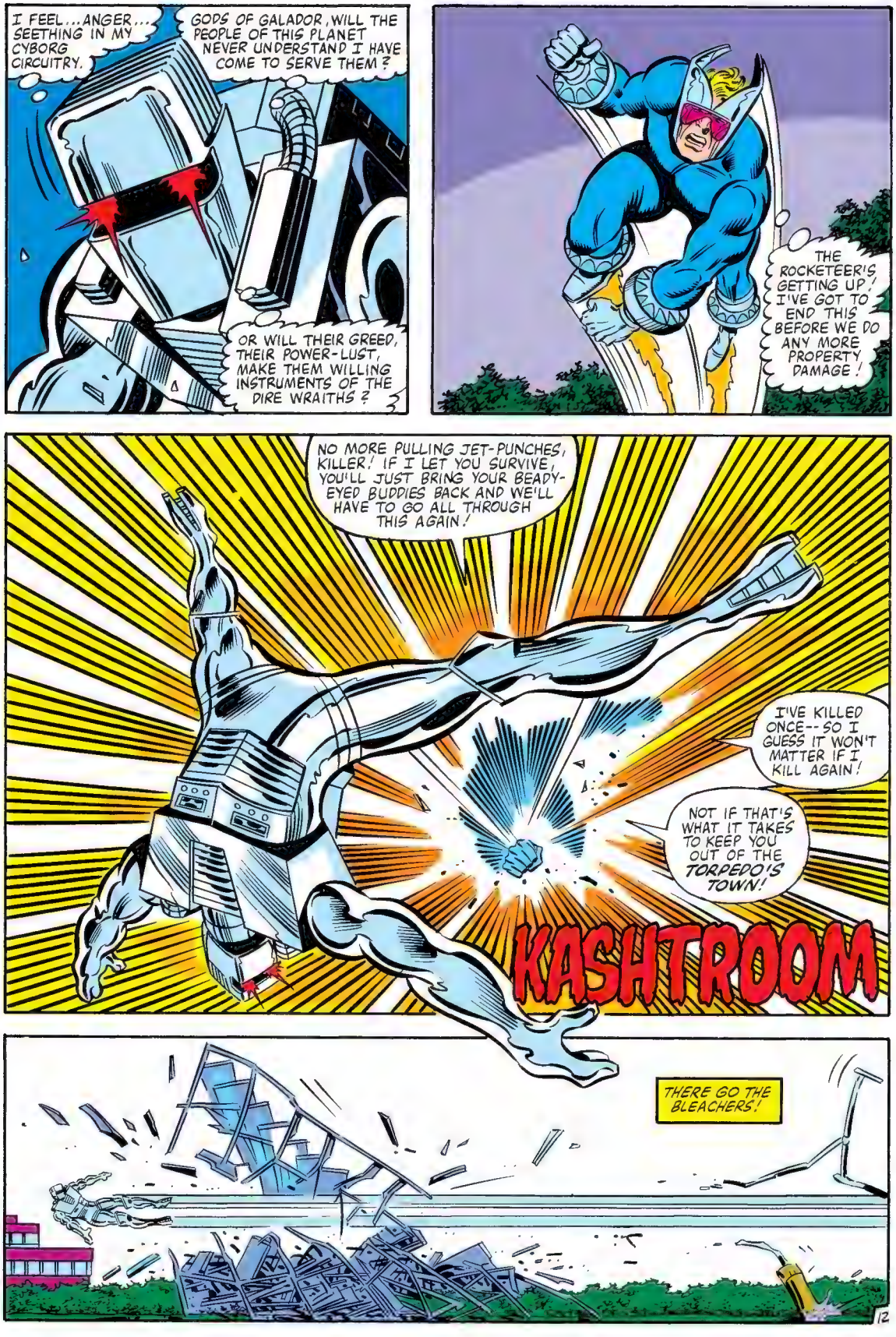

THE DAY WANES AND LAZY SUNDAY SHADOWS EXTEND OVER THE HOME OF JONATHAN AND SARAH CLARK.
HOME FOR THE WEEKEND, BRANDY CLARK DESCENDS INTO HER FATHER'S BASEMENT WORKSHOP...
...TO FIND ROM, SPACE-KNIGHT!
ROM, I HAVE WONDERFUL NEWS! PEOPLE ARE MOVING TO CLAIRTON -- BUYING THE HOMES ABANDONED BY THE WRAITHS YOU BANISHED TO LIMBO!
BUT... WHAT ARE YOU DOING?
TRYING TO ACQUIRE AS MUCH KNOWLEDGE OF YOUR WORLD AS MY CYBORG MEMORY CIRCUITS CAN STORE, BRANDY!
THE PAGES OF THE ENCYCLOPEDIA ARE MOVING --
-- BY THEM-SELVES!
NO. MY TRANSLATOR TURNS THEM EVEN AS IT SCANS THEIR CONTENTS FOR LATER EVALUATION.
I MUST KNOW MORE OF YOUR WORLD BEYOUND THE BOUNDARIES OF CLAIRTON... IF I AM TO CLEANSE IT OF WRAITHKIND.
AND THAT GLOBE? YOU'VE OBVIOUSLY DONE SOMETHING TO IT! WHY?
IT IS A STANDARD SPACE-KNIGHT PROCEDURE. WE TAKE A REPRESENTATIVE MODEL OF A WORLD WE BELIEVE TO BE INFESTED BY WRAITHKIND --
7

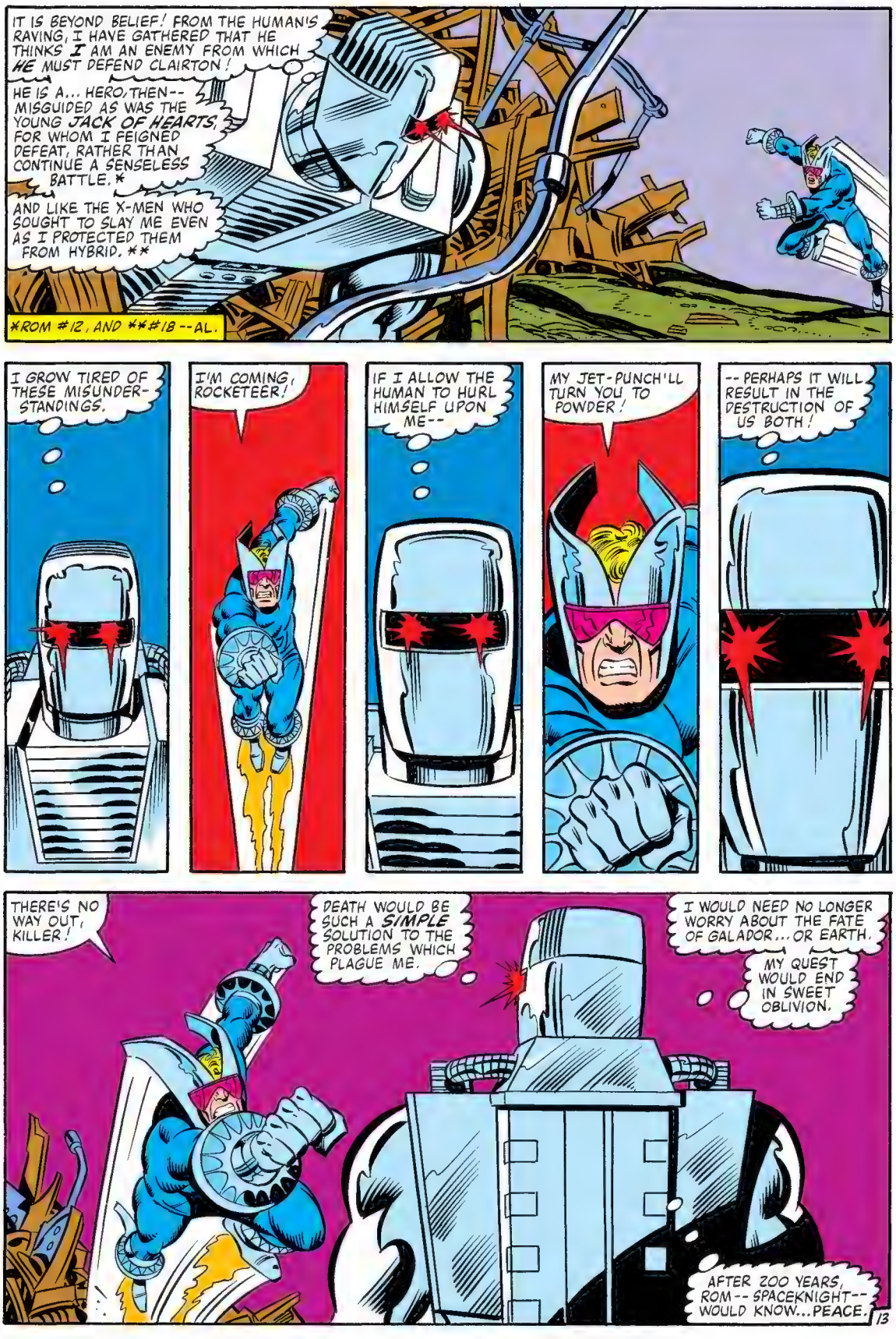

--AND, BY TURNING OUR ENERGY ANALYZERS -- WHICH EVERY SPACE-KNIGHT POSSESSES IN ONE FORM OR ANOTHER -- ON IT, USE IT TO PIN-POINT POSSIBLE CONCENTRA-TIONS OF WRAITH ACTIVITY.
SO MANY AREAS LIT UP -- ALL OVER THE WORLD!
YES, THERE ARE MANY INDICATIONS OF WRAITH EVIL ON EARTH -- SO MANY THAT I MAY NEVER COM-PLETE MY QUEST AND RETURN HOME.
OH, ROM -- I KNOW HOW YOU MUST FEEL -- NOT KNOWING WHETHER GAL-ADOR STILL EXISTS OR NOT! IF I HAD DOUBTS ABOUT MY HOME, MY FAMILY AND FRIENDS, I'D WANT TO RETURN, TOO!
YOU BID ME GO TO GALADOR, BRANDY CLARK, WHEN YOUR OWN SELF-PRESERVATION DEMANDS THAT I STAY? YOU ARE BRAVE, WOMAN OF EARTH.
NO, ROM -- I'M TERRIFIED OF WHAT MIGHT HAPPEN TO ME IF THE WRAITHS WERE TO RETURN TO CLAIRTON AND FIND YOU GONE!
I AM AFRAID TO THINK OF YOU ALONE, FACING UNKNOWN DANGER SOMEWHERE LIGHT YEARS AWAY FROM ME!
WHEN SHE LOOKS AT ME LIKE THAT, I...
I WILL BE BACK, BRANDY CLARK.
HE'S TROUBLED -- AND I DON'T KNOW HOW TO HELP HIM!
ON GALADOR I COULD RECLAIM MY HUMAN-ITY WHICH WAS SACRIFICED WHEN I BE-CAME A SPACEKNIGHT TO BATTLE THE WRAITHS --
--AND THEN RETURN TO EARTH, A MAN OF FLESH IN-STEAD OF METAL --
--TO DECLARE MY LOVE FOR BRANDY CLARK!
BUT WOULD SHE BE ALIVE WHEN HE RETURNED? OR WORSE, WOULD SHE NOT LOVE HIM IN RETURN?
ROM, I... LOVE YOU.
HE IS TOO FAR AWAY TO HEAR
NIGHT OVER THE FORMER MASON HOUSE... NOW THE HOME OF BROCK JONES AND FAMILY.
THE KIDS ASLEEP, HONEY?
IT TOOK 'WINNIE THE POOH' AND THE PROMISE THAT I'D VISIT THEIR NEW SCHOOL WITH THEM TOMORROW --
-- BUT, YES, THE LITTLE ANGELS ARE FINALLY IN SLUMBERLAND.
8

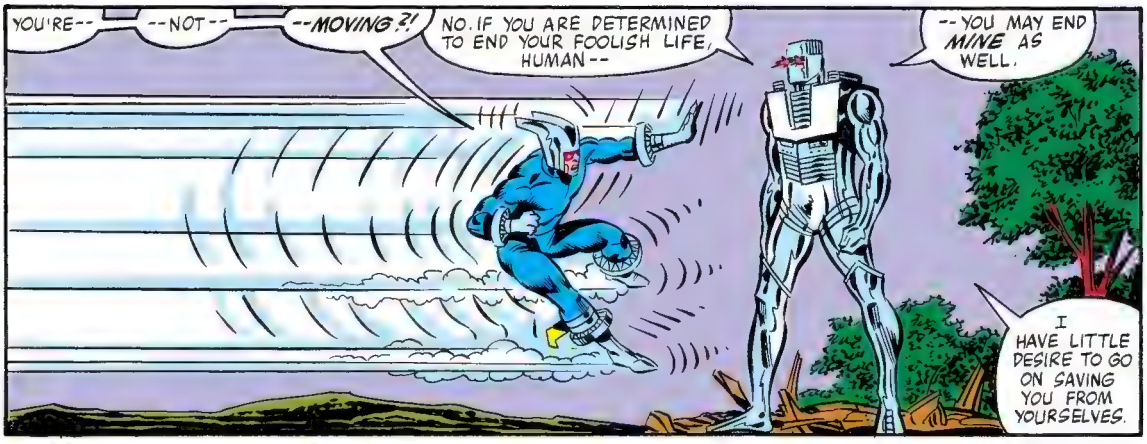

WHICH MEANS THAT YOU AND I ARE FINALLY ALONE IN OUR NEW HOME, HUSBAND MINE!
LORRY, HONEY, I... I NEED TO TAKE A WALK.
A WALK? NOW?
PLEASE UNDERSTAND, THE MOVE, QUITTING MY JOB--EVERYTHING HAPPENED SO FAST, I NEED TO SORT THINGS OUT.
SIGH! DON'T BE LONG, BROCK JONES!
I'LL UNPACK THE SHEETS!
SOON, A LONE FIGURE STANDS ON THE MOONLIT FOOTBALL FIELD OF CLAIRTON HIGH SCHOOL...
HOW COULD I BE SUCH A FOOL TO ENDANGER LORRY AND THE KIDS?
WHY'D I EVER ACCEPT THE TORPEDO COSTUME FROM THE GUY WHO DEVELOPED IT? WHY? BECAUSE HE WAS DYING AND I WAS BORED! I NEEDED SOME EXCITEMENT--THE KIND SELLING INSURANCE COULDN'T GET ME!
I GOT IT, ALL RIGHT! IT SEEMED LIKE A GAME--BEATING THE ROCKETEERS! WHO'D HAVE THOUGHT THEY'D COME... BACK?
THAT FLASH ACROSS THE NIGHT SKY--LIKE THE JET-BACKWASH OF A ROCKET PACK! IT'S GOT TO BE THEM! MY RUNNING AWAY WAS USELESS!
THE ROCKETEERS HAVE FOUND ME AGAIN!
THERE'LL BE NO RUNNING AWAY THIS TIME! IF THEY WANT THE TORPEDO--
--THEY'LL FIND HIM, READY TO KILL TO DEFEND HIS FAMILY AND HOME!
AND THIS TIME I'M GOING TO GET SOME ANSWERS BEFORE I JET-PUNCH THOSE HIGH-FLYING ASSASSINS TO ASH!
ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS LIKE: WHAT MANNER OF BEINGS ARE THEY, WHO CRUMBLE INTO POWDER WHEN THEY'RE KILLED?
AND: HOW'D THEY FIND OUT MY SECRET IDENTITY WHEN I NEVER EVEN TOLD MY OWN WIFE?
9


THERE'S THE ROCKET TRAIL, HEADING TOWARDS CLAIRTON... AND MY HOME!
THE TORPEDO FORCES HIS BOOT JETS INTO FULL THRUST, AND SCREAMS OUT OF THE SKY, HOPING TO CATCH HIS QUARRY OFF GUARD!
WHAT--?
HERE'S WHERE THE HUNTED BECOMES THE HUNTER!
TKLANG
"TKLANG"?! I NEVER MET ANY ROCKETEER ENCASED IN METAL BEFORE!
BUT I NEVER SAW ONE TURN TO ASH, EITHER, UNTIL RECENTLY!
MAYBE THEY'VE CHANGED--IN MORE WAYS THAN ONE-- TO COUNTER MY JET POWER?
NOT KNOWING WHY HE HAS BEEN ATTACKED--OR BY WHOM--ROM PLUMMETS TO EARTH...
...CRASHING DOWN ON THE 40-YARD LINE!
HE'S GETTING UP! CRIPES! THE ROCKET-SUITS WERE DESIGNED BY THE SAME GUY WHO MADE MY TORPEDO COSTUME!
THE DESIGNER IS DEAD-- KILLED BY AN INSANE SENATOR--
--WHO WANTED HIM TO MASS-- PRODUCE MILLIONS OF TORPEDO SUITS TO EQUIP AN ARMY CAPABLE OF TAKING OVER THE COUNTRY!
BUT SENATOR STIVAK'S DEAD, TOO, AND THIS NEW ROCKETEER'S WEARING ARMOR THAT SEEMS EVERY BIT AS POWERFUL AS THE TORPEDO SUIT--SO NOW WHO'S AFTER ME, AND WHY?
HOLY SMOKES! IN DROPPING HIM ON THE FOOTBALL FIELD, I CAUSED A CRATER THE SIZE OF A NEW YORK POTHOLE!
HE COULD HAVE FALLEN ON A HOUSE!
THE TORPEDO REMEMBERS THE LAST TIME HIS POWER, UNLEASHED AGAINST DAREDEVIL IN A SUBURBAN HOME, WREAKED INCREDIBLE DAMAGE. HE DOES NOT WANT TO BE RESPONSIBLE FOR THE SAME THING HAPPENING HERE.
NOT IN HIS NEW HOMETOWN.
10


OKAY! I'LL CALM DOWN-- SEE IF I CAN GET THIS ROCKETEER TO SURRENDER!
STAND UP NICE AND SLOW, SILVER-SHELL! I DON'T WANT TO HURT YOU, BUT...
YOU HAVE ALREADY STRUCK AT ME.
NOW MY ANALYZER WILL REVEAL...
SOME KIND OF RAY-GUN MATERIALIZING IN HIS HAND! IT LOOKS LETHAL! I'VE GOT TO TRY A QUARTER-BACK SNEAK--
--AND LET A JET-POWERED PUNCH KNOCK IT FROM HIS HAND BEFORE HE CAN OPEN FIRE!
SKROW
IN THE INSTANT BEFORE HE STRUCK, MY ANALYZER'S BEAM REVEALED MY ATTACKER TO BE HUMAN!
IS HE SOME PAWN OF THE DIRE WRAITHS, GIVEN POWER BY THEIR SCIENCE AND SORCERY--
--THAT HE MIGHT SLAY ME AND PREPARE THE WAY FOR HIS VILE MASTERS TO TAKE A DEFENSELESS CLAIRTON?
I'VE DONE IT AGAIN! THE ROCKETEER SMASHED THE HIGH SCHOOL'S GOAL POSTS! REPLACING THEM'LL COST A SMALL FORTUNE!
IF I KEEP THIS UP, I MAY PUT MYSELF OUT OF A JOB!
THE HUMAN COMES AT ME AGAIN!


I FEEL...ANGER... SEETHING IN MY CYBORG CIRCUITRY.
GODS OF GALADOR, WILL THE PEOPLE OF THIS PLANET NEVER UNDERSTAND I HAVE COME TO SERVE THEM?
OR WILL THEIR GREED, THEIR POWER-LUST, MAKE THEM WILLING INSTRUMENTS OF THE DIRE WRAITHS?
THE ROCKETEER'S GETTING UP! I'VE GOT TO END THIS BEFORE WE DO ANY MORE PROPERTY DAMAGE!
NO MORE PULLING JET-PUNCHES, KILLER! IF I LET YOU SURVIVE, YOU'LL JUST BRING YOUR BEADY-EYED BUDDIES BACK AND WE'LL HAVE TO GO ALL THROUGH THIS AGAIN!
I'VE KILLED ONCE--SO I GUESS IT WON'T MATTER IF I KILL AGAIN!
NOT IF THAT'S WHAT IT TAKES TO KEEP YOU OUT OF THE TORPEDO'S TOWN!
KASHTROOM
THERE GO THE BLEACHERS!
12


IT IS BEYOND BELIEF! FROM THE HUMAN'S RAVING, I HAVE GATHERED THAT HE THINKS I AM AN ENEMY FROM WHICH HE MUST DEFEND CLAIRTON!
HE IS A... HERO, THEN-- MISGUIDED AS WAS THE YOUNG JACK OF HEARTS, FOR WHOM I FEIGNED DEFEAT, RATHER THAN CONTINUE A SENSELESS BATTLE.*
AND LIKE THE X-MEN WHO SOUGHT TO SLAY ME EVEN AS I PROTECTED THEM FROM HYBRID.**
*ROM #12, AND **#18 --AL.
I GROW TIRED OF THESE MISUNDERSTANDINGS.
I'M COMING, ROCKETEER!
IF I ALLOW THE HUMAN TO HURL HIMSELF UPON ME--
MY JET-PUNCH'LL TURN YOU TO POWDER!
--PERHAPS IT WILL RESULT IN THE DESTRUCTION OF US BOTH!
THERE'S NO WAY OUT, KILLER!
DEATH WOULD BE SUCH A SIMPLE SOLUTION TO THE PROBLEMS WHICH PLAGUE ME.
I WOULD NEED NO LONGER WORRY ABOUT THE FATE OF GALADOR... OR EARTH.
MY QUEST WOULD END IN SWEET OBLIVION.
AFTER 200 YEARS, ROM -- SPACEKNIGHT -- WOULD KNOW... PEACE.
13

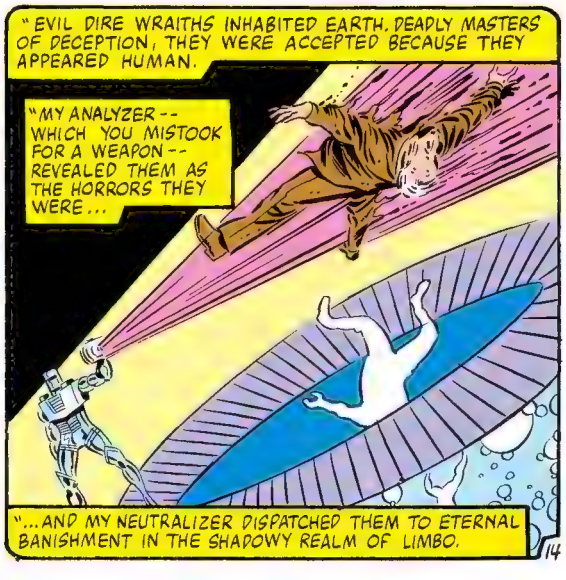

YOU'RE--
--NOT--
--MOVING?!
NO. IF YOU ARE DETERMINED TO END YOUR FOOLISH LIFE, HUMAN--
--YOU MAY END MINE AS WELL.
I HAVE LITTLE DESIRE TO GO ON SAVING YOU FROM YOURSELVES.

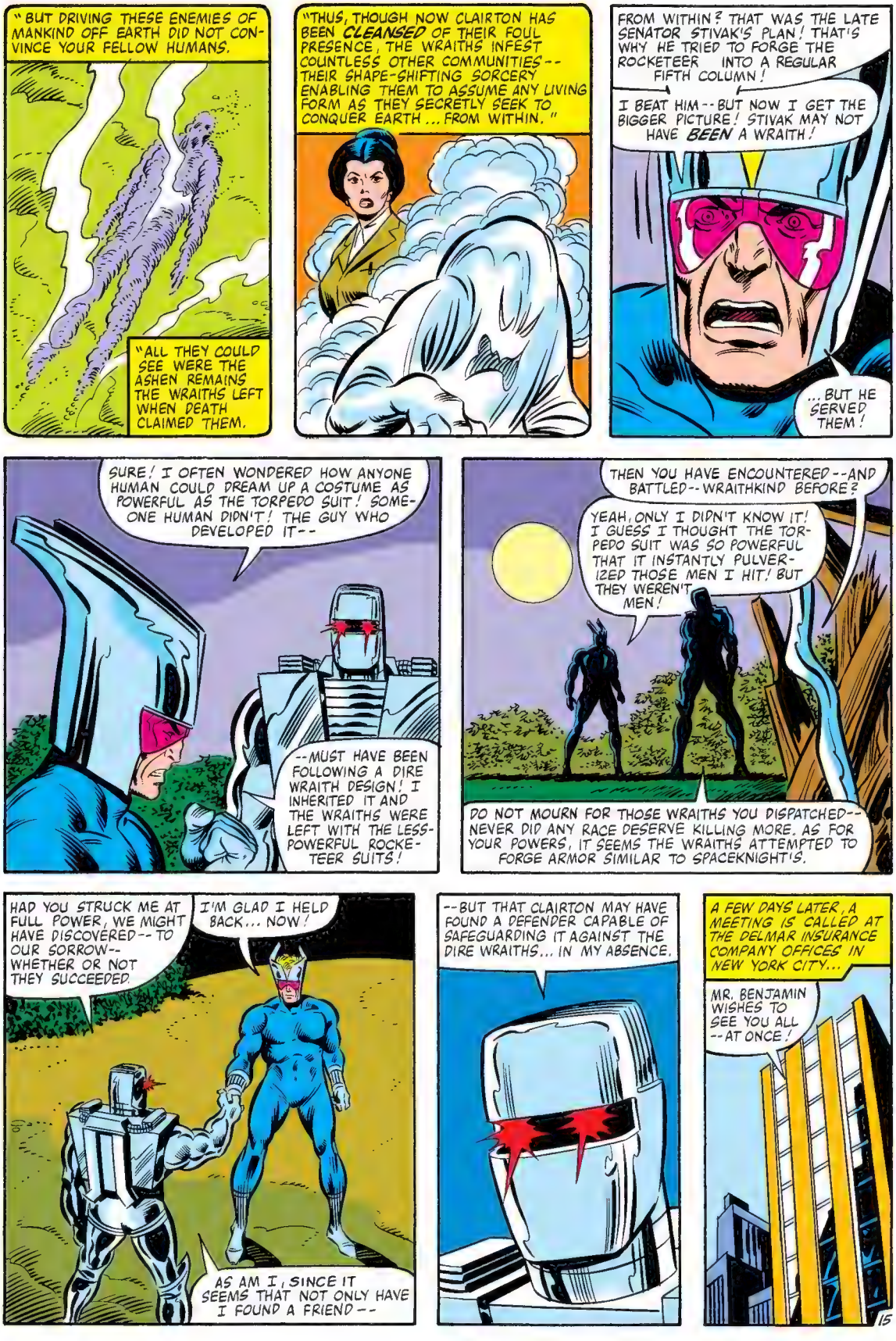
FOR THE LOVE OF MIKE, I CAN'T--! I MEAN, YOU WERE SUPPOSED TO FIGHT BACK!
HOLY SMOKES, I'VE GOT TO UNLEASH THE ACCUMULATED POWER OF MY JET-PUNCH BEFORE I BLOW MY BLASTED ARM OFF!
THE NIGHT LIGHTS UP... BRIEFLY.

I DON'T GET IT! YOU CAME HERE TO KILL ME, DIDN'T YOU? SO WHY'D YOU JUST STAND THERE AS IF YOU WANTED ME TO FINISH YOU OFF?

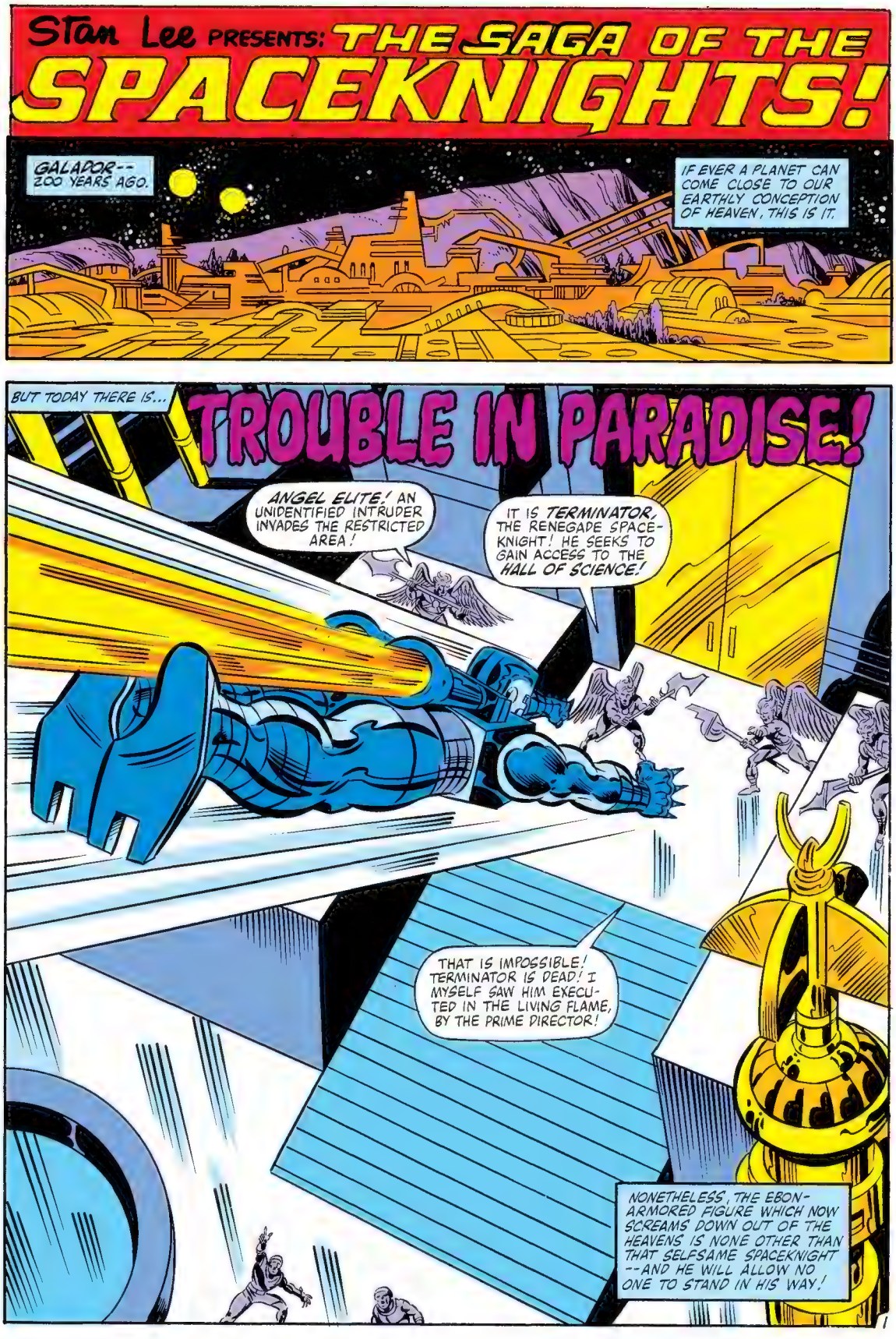
YOU ERR IN A NUMBER OF INSTANCES, HUMAN. FIRST, IT IS NOT CLEAR THAT YOUR BLOW WOULD HAVE SLAIN ME. IT CERTAINLY WOULD HAVE SLAIN YOU.
SECOND, I DID NOT COME HERE TO KILL YOU. INDEED, MY MISSION ON EARTH IS TO SAVE YOU AND ALL YOUR CONFUSED KIND.

"YET, EVER SINCE MY ARRIVAL ON EARTH, HUMANKIND HAS FLED FROM ME IN ABJECT FEAR, REJECTING THE SALVATION I OFFERED.
"MY ARMOR MADE ME... DIFFERENT.
"ALSO, HUMAN EYES COULD NOT PERCEIVE THAT WHICH WAS CLEAR TO MY CYBORG SENSES.


"EVIL DIRE WRAITHS INHABITED EARTH. DEADLY MASTERS OF DECEPTION, THEY WERE ACCEPTED BECAUSE THEY APPEARED HUMAN.
"MY ANALYZER -- WHICH YOU MISTOOK FOR A WEAPON -- REVEALED THEM AS THE HORRORS THEY WERE...
"...AND MY NEUTRALIZER DISPATCHED THEM TO ETERNAL BANISHMENT IN THE SHADOWY REALM OF LIMBO.
14

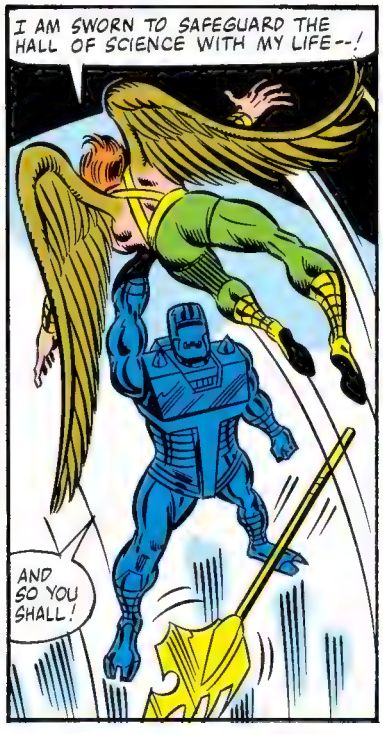

"BUT DRIVING THESE ENEMIES OF MANKIND OFF EARTH DID NOT CONVINCE YOUR FELLOW HUMANS.
"ALL THEY COULD SEE WERE THE ASHEN REMAINS THE WRAITHS LEFT WHEN DEATH CLAIMED THEM.
"THUS, THOUGH NOW CLAIRTON HAS BEEN CLEANSED OF THEIR FOUL PRESENCE, THE WRAITHS INFEST COUNTLESS OTHER COMMUNITIES--THEIR SHAPE-SHIFTING SORCERY ENABLING THEM TO ASSUME ANY LIVING FORM AS THEY SECRETLY SEEK TO CONQUER EARTH ... FROM WITHIN."
FROM WITHIN? THAT WAS THE LATE SENATOR STIVAK'S PLAN! THAT'S WHY HE TRIED TO FORGE THE ROCKETEER INTO A REGULAR FIFTH COLUMN!
I BEAT HIM--BUT NOW I GET THE BIGGER PICTURE! STIVAK MAY NOT HAVE BEEN A WRAITH!
...BUT HE SERVED THEM!
SURE! I OFTEN WONDERED HOW ANYONE HUMAN COULD DREAM UP A COSTUME AS POWERFUL AS THE TORPEDO SUIT! SOMEONE HUMAN DIDN'T! THE GUY WHO DEVELOPED IT--
--MUST HAVE BEEN FOLLOWING A DIRE WRAITH DESIGN! I INHERITED IT AND THE WRAITHS WERE LEFT WITH THE LESS-POWERFUL ROCKETEER SUITS!
THEN YOU HAVE ENCOUNTERED--AND BATTLED--WRAITHKIND BEFORE?
YEAH, ONLY I DIDN'T KNOW IT! I GUESS I THOUGHT THE TORPEDO SUIT WAS SO POWERFUL THAT IT INSTANTLY PULVERIZED THOSE MEN I HIT! BUT THEY WEREN'T MEN!
DO NOT MOURN FOR THOSE WRAITHS YOU DISPATCHED--NEVER DID ANY RACE DESERVE KILLING MORE. AS FOR YOUR POWERS, IT SEEMS THE WRAITHS ATTEMPTED TO FORGE ARMOR SIMILAR TO SPACEKNIGHT'S.
HAD YOU STRUCK ME AT FULL POWER, WE MIGHT HAVE DISCOVERED--TO OUR SORROW--WHETHER OR NOT THEY SUCCEEDED.
I'M GLAD I HELD BACK... NOW!
AS AM I, SINCE IT SEEMS THAT NOT ONLY HAVE I FOUND A FRIEND--
--BUT THAT CLAIRTON MAY HAVE FOUND A DEFENDER CAPABLE OF SAFEGUARDING IT AGAINST THE DIRE WRAITHS... IN MY ABSENCE.
A FEW DAYS LATER, A MEETING IS CALLED AT THE DELMAR INSURANCE COMPANY OFFICES IN NEW YORK CITY...
MR. BENJAMIN WISHES TO SEE YOU ALL--AT ONCE!
15

A HALF-DOZEN INSURANCE ADJUSTERS RISE FROM THEIR DESKS AND MOVE PURPOSEFULLY TOWARDS THE EXECUTIVE OFFICE...
...LEAVING OTHERS PUZZLED AS TO THE PURPOSE OF THE UNANNOUNCED MEETING.
MAGGIE JONES AND EDDIE HARRIS FOR TWO...
...AND PAMELA QUINN FOR THE THIRD.
BUT NO REASON IS GIVEN FOR THE MEETING AND, ONCE THOSE SUMMONED HAVE PASSED BEYOND THE PRESIDENT'S DOOR...
BYRON BENJAMIN PRESIDENT
...NO INFORMATION, ABOUT WHAT IS TRANSPIRING WITHIN, FILTERS OUT.
I ASSUME YOU KNOW WHY I HAVE CALLED YOU ALL HERE?
YES, AND WE ARE READY.
AS YOU MUST ALWAYS BE, OUR ENEMY HAS BEEN FOUND--COINCIDENTALLY, IN THE SAME TOWN FROM WHICH OUR PEOPLE WERE ONLY RECENTLY DRIVEN.
I AM SPEAKING OF THE TORPEDO, OF COURSE, WHO HAS REMOVED HIMSELF AND THE COSTUME HE STOLE FROM US TO CLAIRTON, WEST VIRGINIA
HE HAD ELUDED US...UNTIL, THAT IS, HIS SISTER, MAGGIE JONES, RECEIVED THIS LETTER WHICH I APPROPRIATED FROM HER DESK.
THE FOOL WROTE HIS RETURN ADDRESS ON IT.
GO TO CLAIRTON, KILL BROCK JONES, PROCURE THE TORPEDO SUIT--THAT WE MAY USE IT FOR THE PURPOSE FOR WHICH IT WAS DESIGNED...THE KILLING OF ROM, SPACEKNIGHT!
THIS TIME, THOSE WHO DON THE POWER-SUITS OF THE ROCKETEERS ARE WRAITHS.
UNLIKE THEIR HUMAN PAWNS WHO FIRST TESTED THE ROCKET SUITS IN BATTLE, THESE WRAITH ROCKETEERS DO NOT INTEND TO MAKE MISTAKES!
NEXT ISSUE: STEP RIGHT UP, ROM-LOVERS, FOR THE GREAT ROCKETEERS REVIVAL!
AND DON'T FORGET TO READ: SAGA OF THE SPACEKNIGHTS--IN THIS ISSUE!

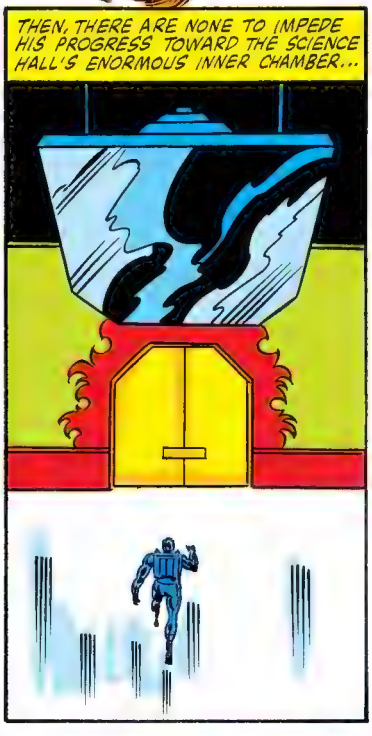

Stan Lee PRESENTS: THE SAGA OF THE SPACEKNIGHTS!
GALADOR-- 200 YEARS AGO.
IF EVER A PLANET CAN COME CLOSE TO OUR EARTHLY CONCEPTION OF HEAVEN, THIS IS IT.
BUT TODAY THERE IS...
TROUBLE IN PARADISE!
ANGEL ELITE! AN UNIDENTIFIED INTRUDER INVADES THE RESTRICTED AREA!
IT IS TERMINATOR, THE RENEGADE SPACE-KNIGHT! HE SEEKS TO GAIN ACCESS TO THE HALL OF SCIENCE!
THAT IS IMPOSSIBLE! TERMINATOR IS DEAD! I MYSELF SAW HIM EXECUTED IN THE LIVING FLAME, BY THE PRIME DIRECTOR!
NONETHELESS, THE EBON-ARMORED FIGURE WHICH NOW SCREAMS DOWN OUT OF THE HEAVENS IS NONE OTHER THAN THAT SELFSAME SPACEKNIGHT --AND HE WILL ALLOW NO ONE TO STAND IN HIS WAY!

TERMINATOR'S BLACKLIGHT EYEBEAMS STAB FORTH! THEY ARE AS COLD AS NIGHT, AND AS DEADLY AS ANY WEAPON EVER CONCEIVED!
THEIR ORIGINAL PURPOSE WAS TO SLAY DIRE WRAITHS!
TODAY THEY FREEZE THE BLOOD OF GALADOR'S GENETICALLY-ENGINEERED ANGEL ELITE, A HOME GUARD KNOWN FOR THEIR BRAVERY AND LOYALTY...
YAARGH!
...IF NOT, ALAS, FOR THEIR INVINCIBILITY!
STAND BACK! I DO NOT DESIRE TO CAUSE YOUR DEATHS, ANGELS--
--BUT CAUSE THEM I WILL, IF YOU BAR MY ENTRANCE TO THE HALL OF SCIENCE!
THE ANGELS RALLY, BUT TERMINATOR IGNORES THEM, TURNING HIS EYE-BEAMS ON THE GREAT BRAZEN DOORS!
SO INTENSE IS THE COLD EMMITTED BY HIS EYEBEAMS...
...THAT THE DOOR'S ATOMIC STRUCTURE IS DEVASTATED.
THAT WHICH I MUST DESTROY IS STORED WITHIN!
AND MY EYEBEAMS SHALL SEAL THE WAY BEHIND ME, ELIMINATING ATTACK FROM THE REAR!
SSHHHHHHHH
THERE ARE STILL GUARDIANS WITHIN THE HALL OF SCIENCE TO BE DEALT WITH, MURDERER!
AYE, INDEED THERE ARE--
2

--BUT NOT FOR LONG!
SVAK!
THE SOUND OF BREAKING BONE IS NEVER PLEASANT!

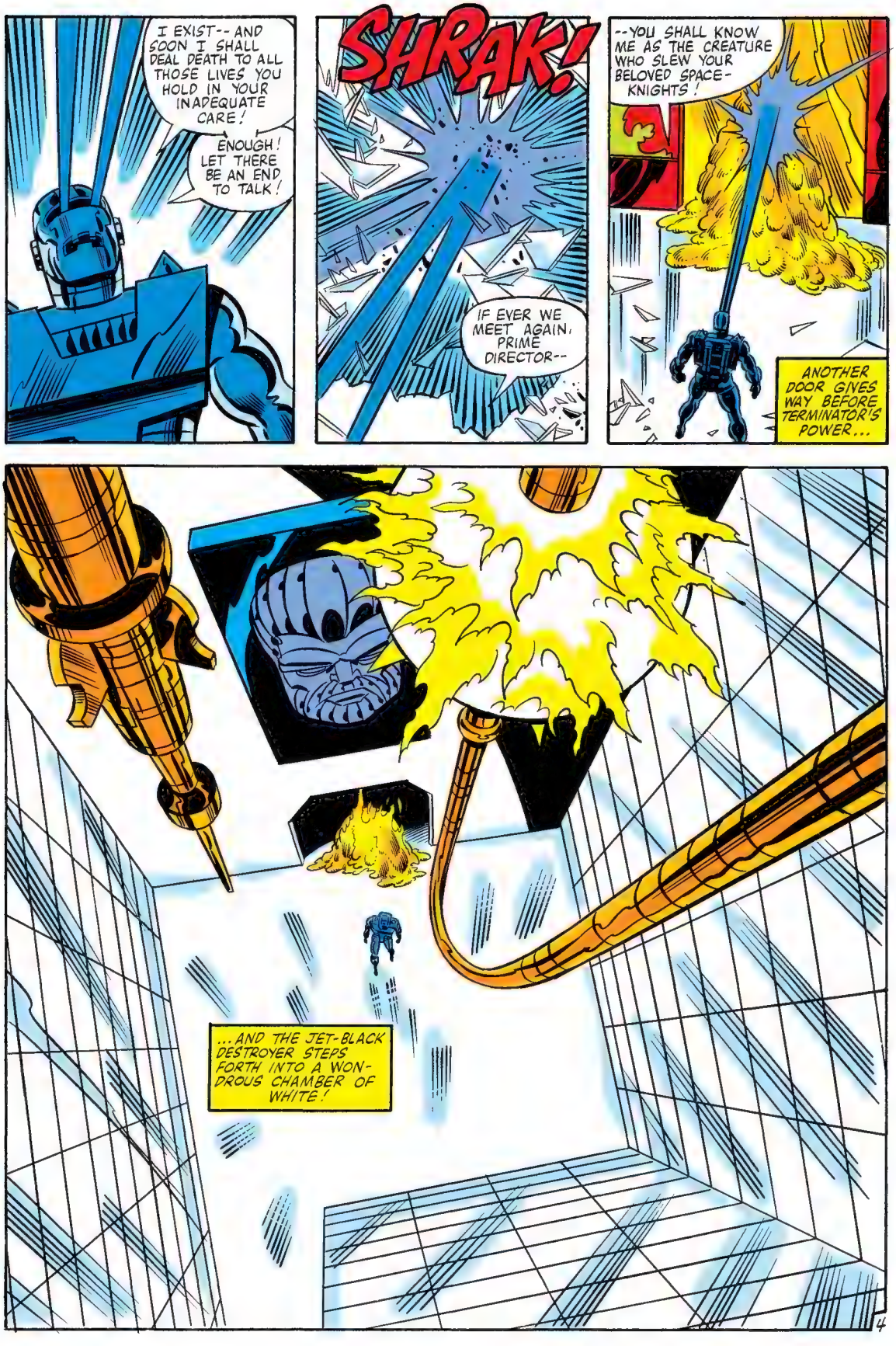

I AM SWORN TO SAFEGUARD THE HALL OF SCIENCE WITH MY LIFE--!
AND SO YOU SHALL!

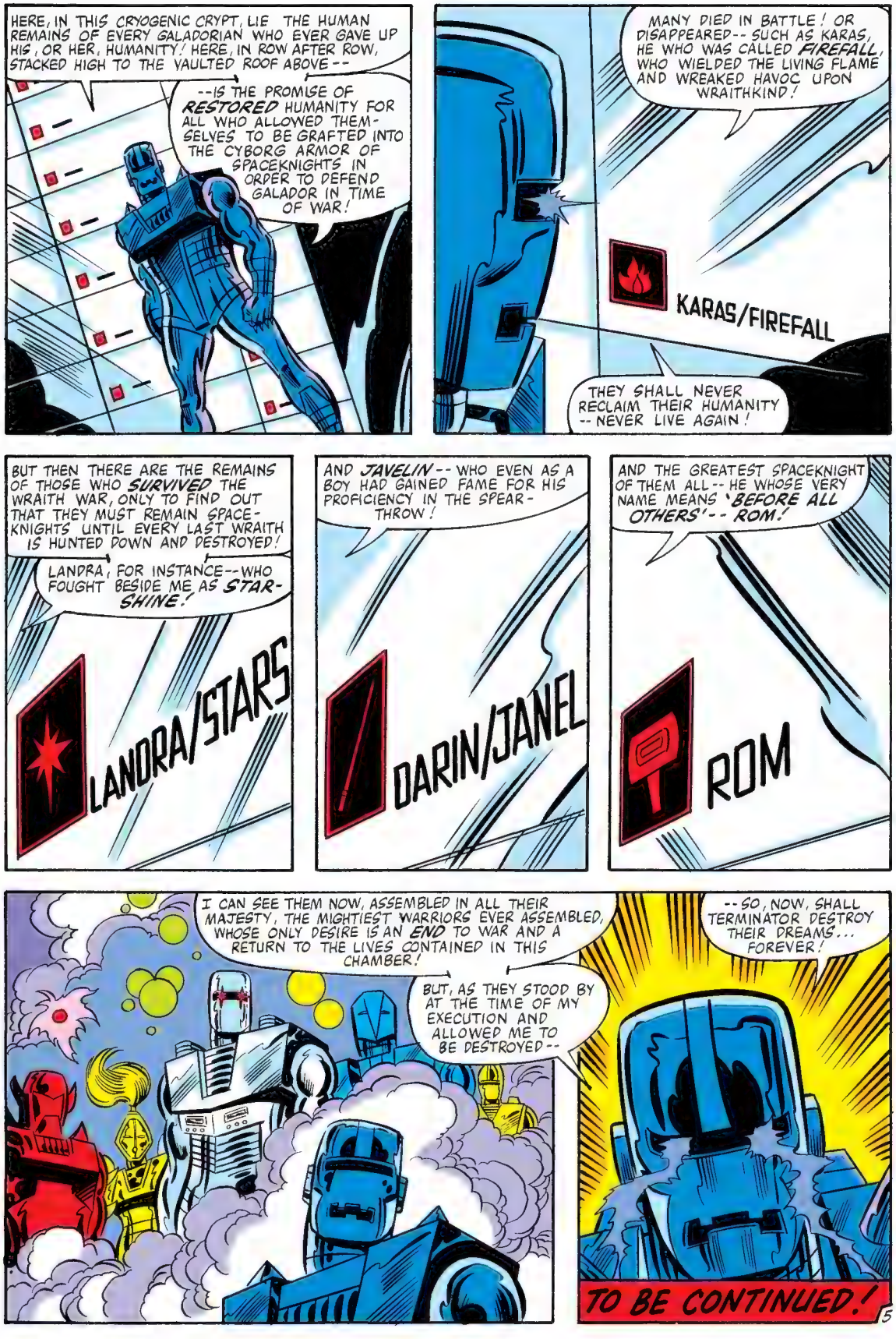
LET THE ANNALS OF HEROES RECORD THAT YOU DID YOUR DUTY WELL--
--UNTIL THE MOMENT DEATH CLAIMED YOU!


THEN, THERE ARE NONE TO IMPEDE HIS PROGRESS TOWARD THE SCIENCE HALL'S ENORMOUS INNER CHAMBER...

...BUT THAT DOES NOT STOP THE PRIME DIRECTOR, REGAL RULER OF ALL GALADOR, FROM THE FUTILE ATTEMPT!
INTRUDER! IF YOU HAVE ACTIVATED THIS VIEW-MONITOR, YOU ARE IN A RESTRICTED AREA!
GODS OF GALADOR! TERMINATOR!
AYE, PRIME DIRECTOR--HE WHO YOU EXECUTED IN THE LIVING FIRE!

YES, I DID ORDER AND CARRY OUT YOUR EXECUTION ACCORDING TO YOUR OWN WISHES! BUT...
...YOU LIVE?!
3


I EXIST-- AND SOON I SHALL DEAL DEATH TO ALL THOSE LIVES YOU HOLD IN YOUR INADEQUATE CARE!
ENOUGH! LET THERE BE AN END TO TALK!
SHRAK!
IF EVER WE MEET AGAIN, PRIME DIRECTOR--
--YOU SHALL KNOW ME AS THE CREATURE WHO SLEW YOUR BELOVED SPACE-KNIGHTS!
ANOTHER DOOR GIVES WAY BEFORE TERMINATOR'S POWER...
...AND THE JET-BLACK DESTROYER STEPS FORTH INTO A WONDROUS CHAMBER OF WHITE!
4


HERE, IN THIS CRYOGENIC CRYPT, LIE THE HUMAN REMAINS OF EVERY GALADORIAN WHO EVER GAVE UP HIS, OR HER, HUMANITY! HERE, IN ROW AFTER ROW, STACKED HIGH TO THE VAULTED ROOF ABOVE--
--IS THE PROMISE OF RESTORED HUMANITY FOR ALL WHO ALLOWED THEMSELVES TO BE GRAFTED INTO THE CYBORG ARMOR OF SPACEKNIGHTS IN ORDER TO DEFEND GALADOR IN TIME OF WAR!
MANY DIED IN BATTLE! OR DISAPPEARED-- SUCH AS KARAS, HE WHO WAS CALLED FIREFALL, WHO WIELDED THE LIVING FLAME AND WREAKED HAVOC UPON WRAITHKIND!
KARAS/FIREFALL
THEY SHALL NEVER RECLAIM THEIR HUMANITY -- NEVER LIVE AGAIN!
BUT THEN THERE ARE THE REMAINS OF THOSE WHO SURVIVED THE WRAITH WAR, ONLY TO FIND OUT THAT THEY MUST REMAIN SPACEKNIGHTS UNTIL EVERY LAST WRAITH IS HUNTED DOWN AND DESTROYED!
LANDRA, FOR INSTANCE--WHO FOUGHT BESIDE ME AS STARSHINE!
LANDRA/STARS
AND JAVELIN-- WHO EVEN AS A BOY HAD GAINED FAME FOR HIS PROFICIENCY IN THE SPEAR-THROW!
DARIN/JANEL
AND THE GREATEST SPACEKNIGHT OF THEM ALL-- HE WHOSE VERY NAME MEANS 'BEFORE ALL OTHERS'-- ROM!
ROM
I CAN SEE THEM NOW, ASSEMBLED IN ALL THEIR MAJESTY, THE MIGHTIEST WARRIORS EVER ASSEMBLED, WHOSE ONLY DESIRE IS AN END TO WAR AND A RETURN TO THE LIVES CONTAINED IN THIS CHAMBER!
BUT, AS THEY STOOD BY AT THE TIME OF MY EXECUTION AND ALLOWED ME TO BE DESTROYED--
--SO, NOW, SHALL TERMINATOR DESTROY THEIR DREAMS... FOREVER!
TO BE CONTINUED!
5

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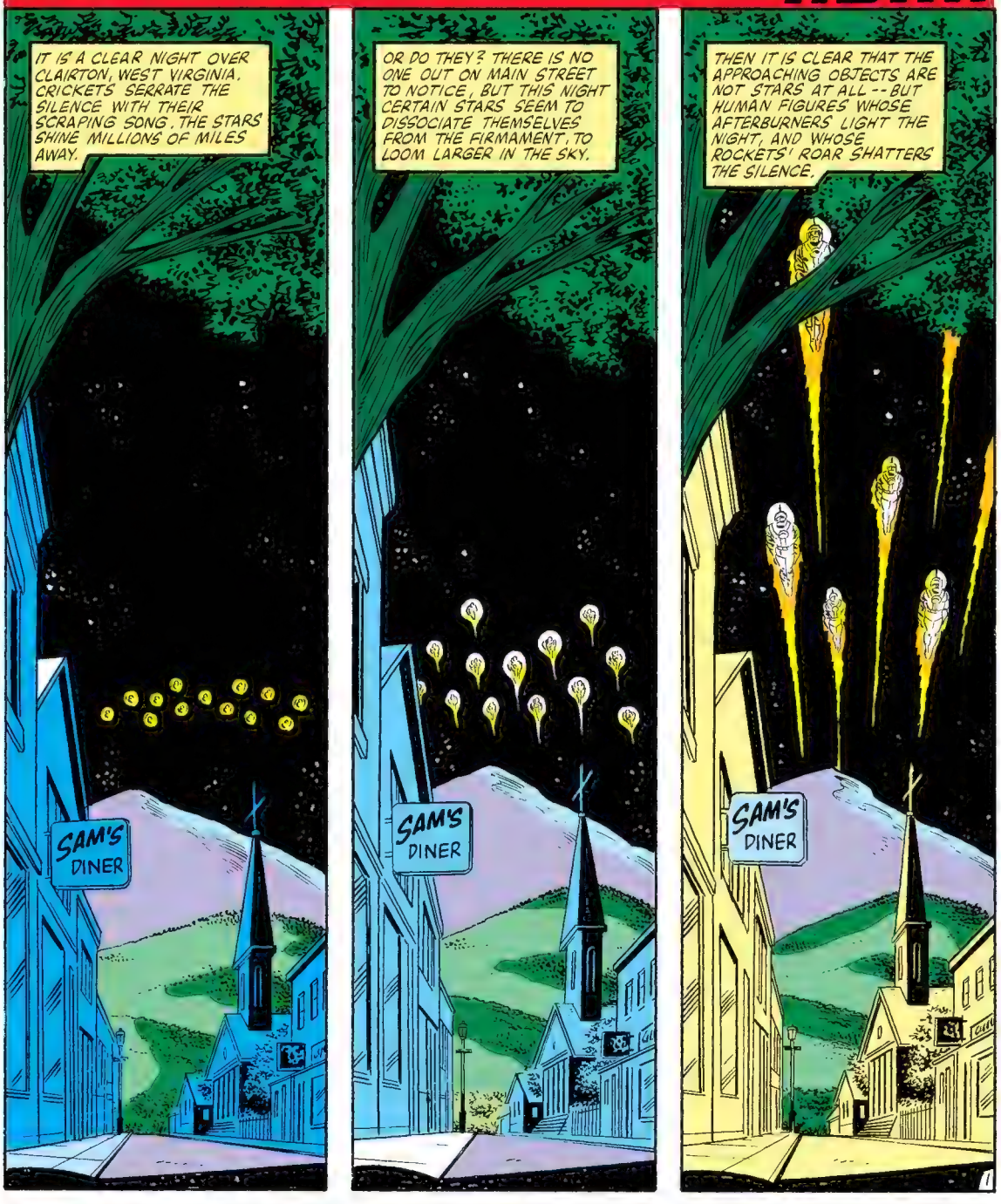
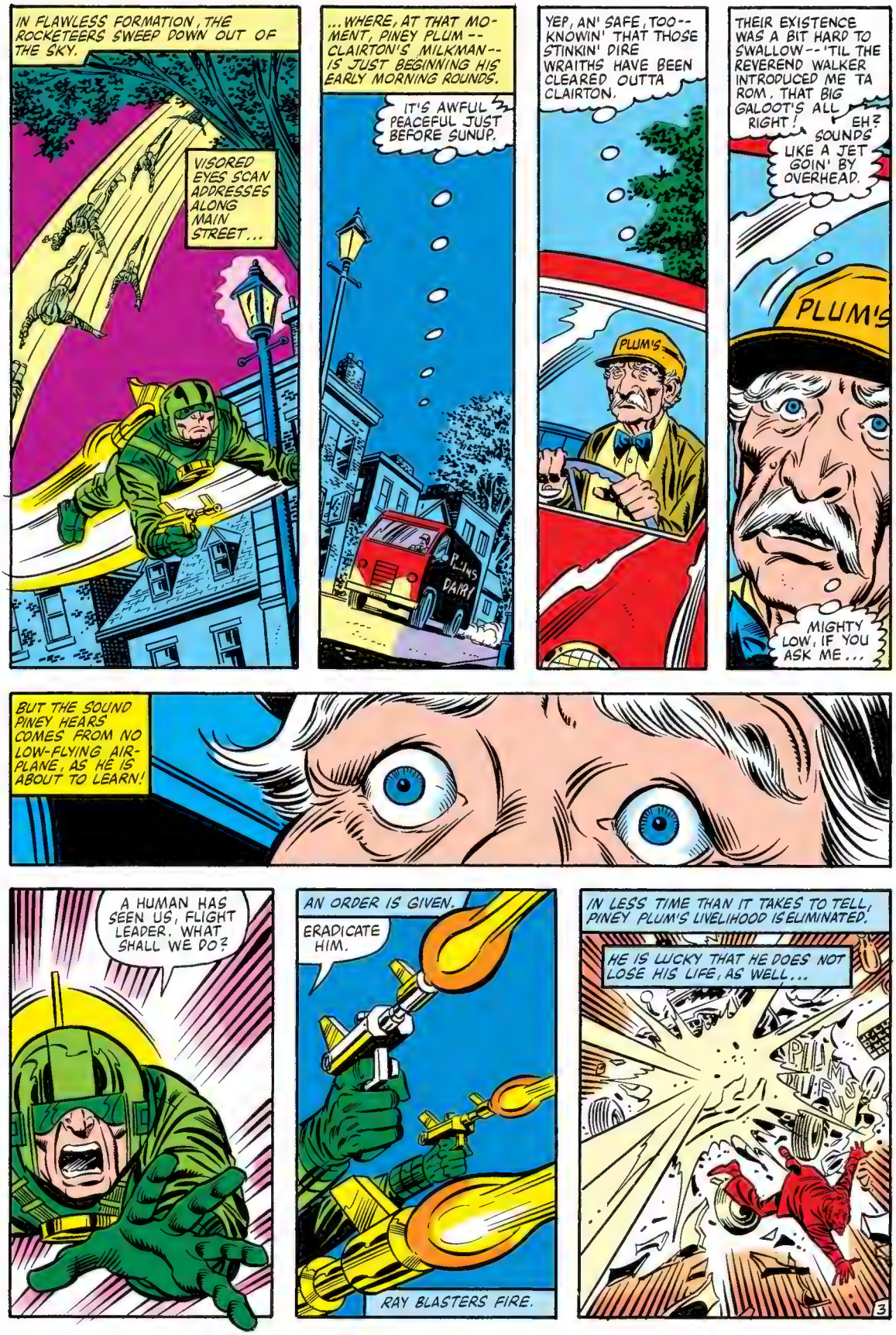
TM
SILVER SPACEKNIGHT AND HUMAN TORPEDO BATTLE THE RAVAGING ROCKETEERS!
MILGROM

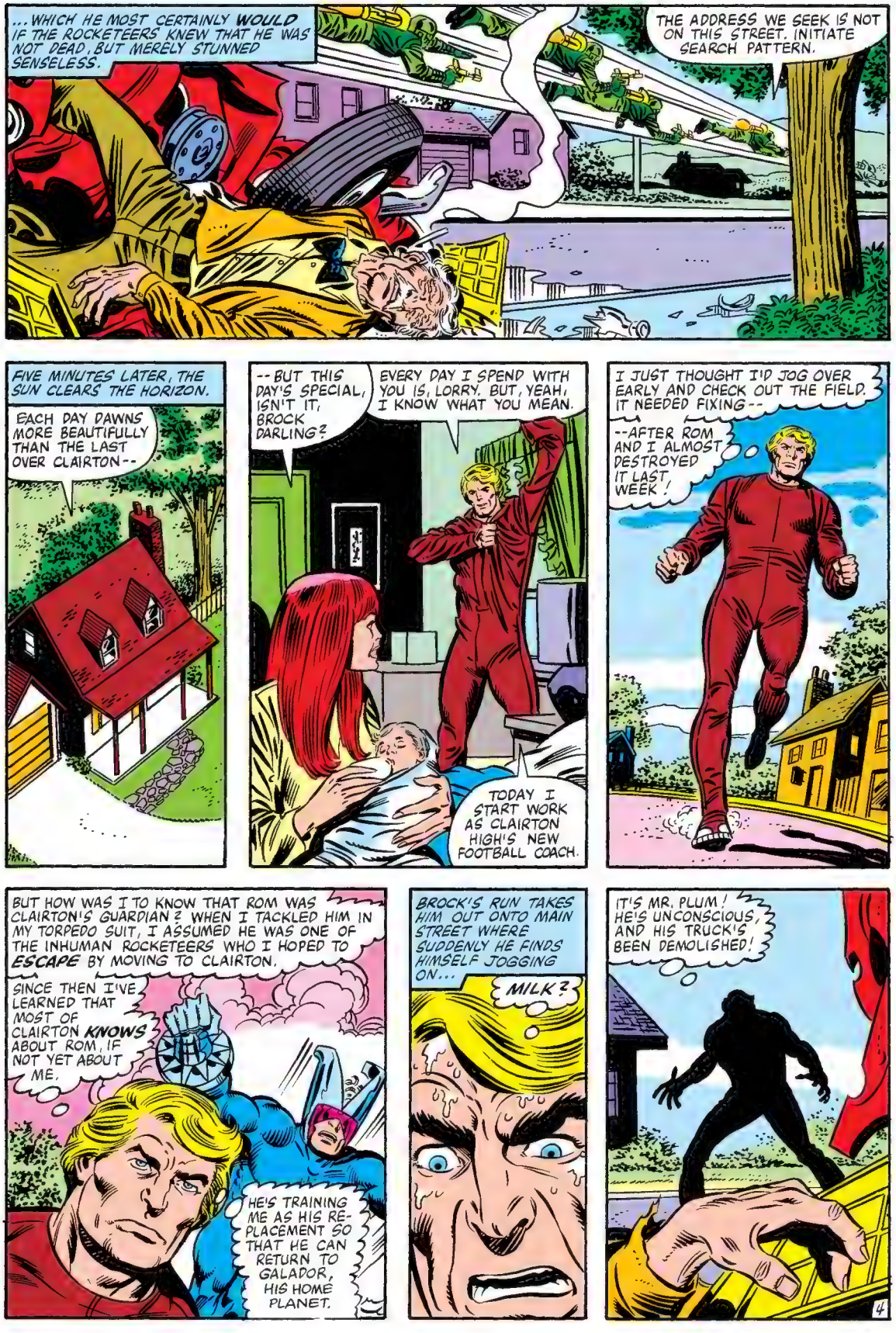
Two-hundred years ago, the evil Dire Wraiths threatened the peace-loving planet, Galador. In their homeworld's darkest hour, a thousand brave, young Galadorians sacrificed humanity itself to become Cyborg Warriors, a last desperate line of defense. Though hopelessly outnumbered, these Spaceknights triumphed, and pursued the remnants of the Wraith horde across the universe. Now, alone in the Enemy's mightiest stronghold, on a backward planet called Earth, one Galadorian Warrior faces his most awesome challenge.

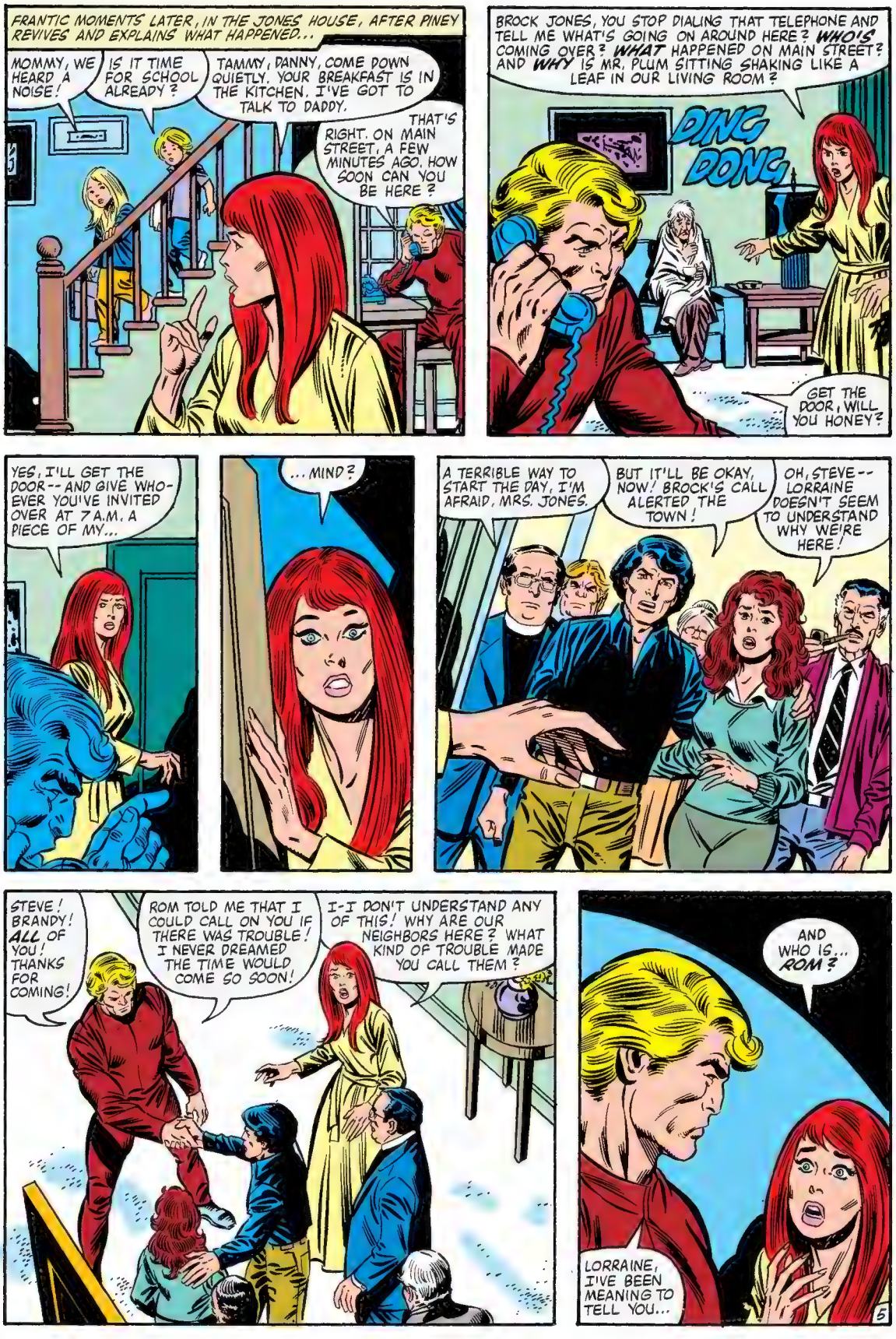
Stan Lee PRESENTS: THE GREATEST OF THE SPACEKNIGHTS--ROM!

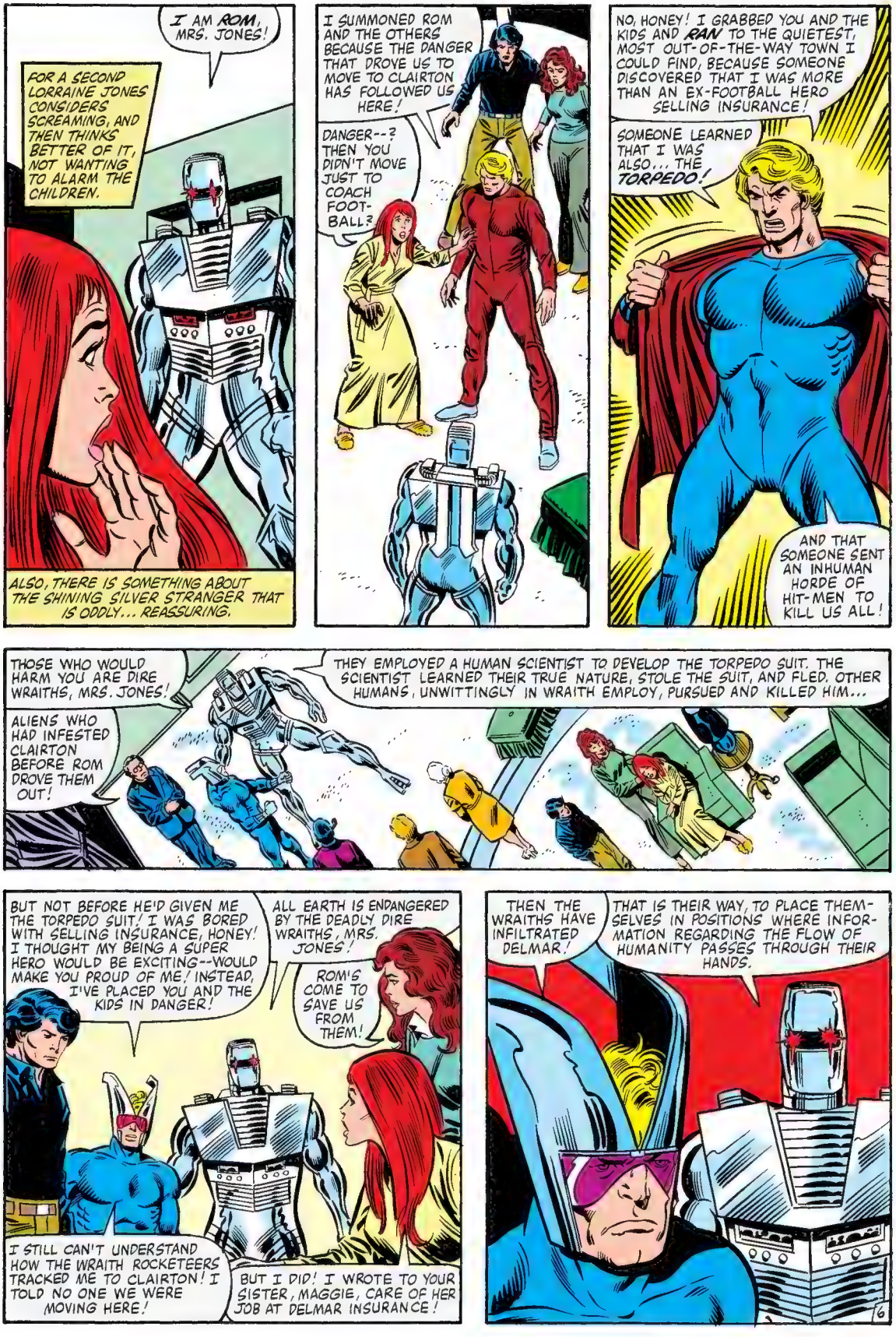

IT IS A CLEAR NIGHT OVER CLAIRTON, WEST VIRGINIA. CRICKETS SERRATE THE SILENCE WITH THEIR SCRAPING SONG. THE STARS SHINE MILLIONS OF MILES AWAY.
SAM'S DINER
OR DO THEY? THERE IS NO ONE OUT ON MAIN STREET TO NOTICE, BUT THIS NIGHT CERTAIN STARS SEEM TO DISSOCIATE THEMSELVES FROM THE FIRMAMENT, TO LOOM LARGER IN THE SKY.
SAM'S DINER
THEN IT IS CLEAR THAT THE APPROACHING OBJECTS ARE NOT STARS AT ALL -- BUT HUMAN FIGURES WHOSE AFTERBURNERS LIGHT THE NIGHT, AND WHOSE ROCKETS' ROAR SHATTERS THE SILENCE.
SAM'S DINER

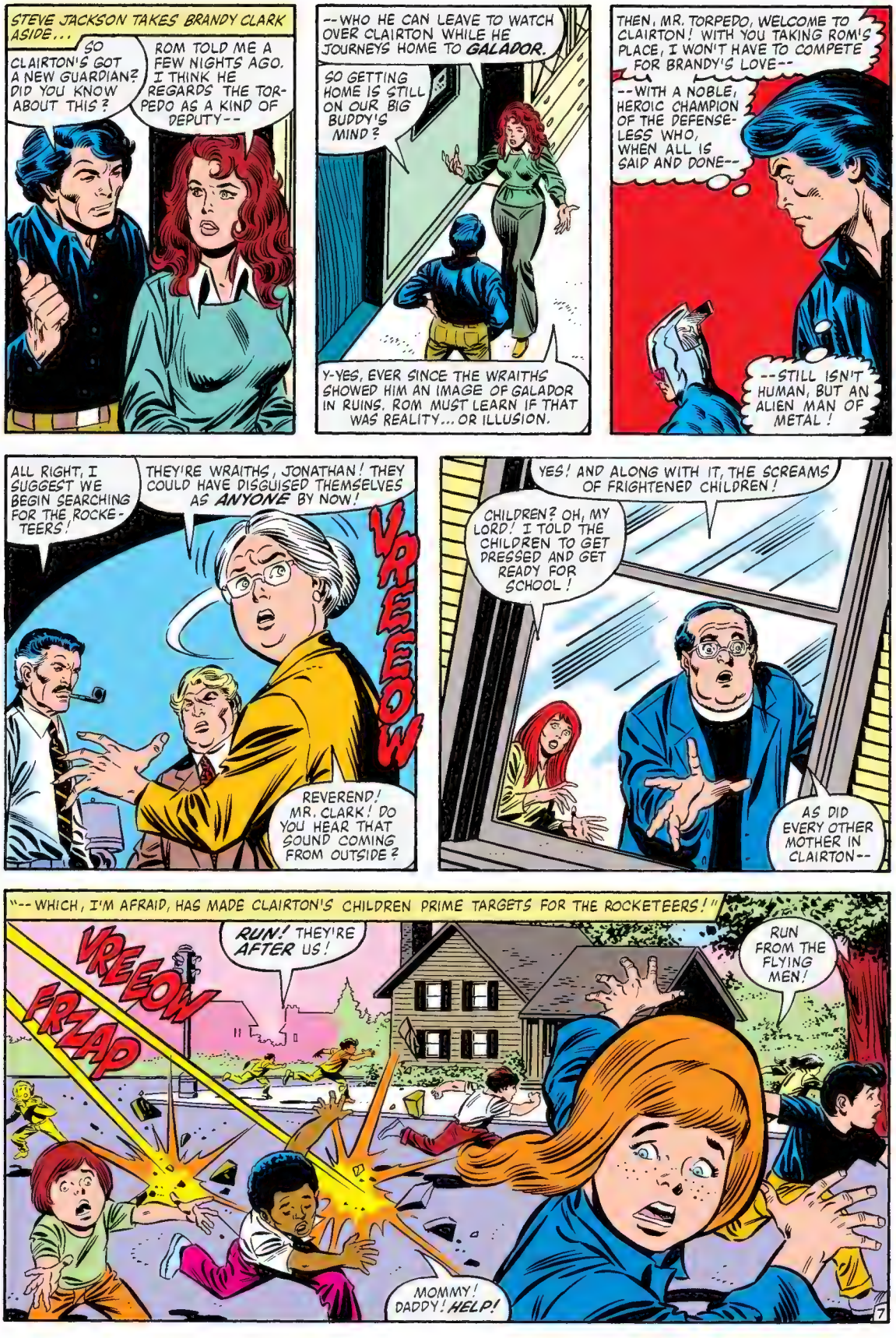
WELCOME, ONE AND ALL, TO THE
GREAT ROCKETEERS REVIVAL!
BILL MANTLO & SAL BUSCEMA
WRITER/STORYTELLERS / ARTIST
JOE SINNOTT
EMBELLISHER
JIM NOVAK, LETTERS
BEN SEAN, COLORS
AL MILGROM, EDITOR
JIM SHOOTER,
EDITOR-IN-CHIEF
CLAIRTON LIES BELOW US, FLIGHT LEADER.
IT IS THERE THAT OUR ENEMY WILL BE FOUND!
2


IN FLAWLESS FORMATION, THE ROCKETEERS SWEEP DOWN OUT OF THE SKY.
VISORED EYES SCAN ADDRESSES ALONG MAIN STREET...
...WHERE, AT THAT MOMENT, PINEY PLUM -- CLAIRTON'S MILKMAN -- IS JUST BEGINNING HIS EARLY MORNING ROUNDS.
IT'S AWFUL PEACEFUL JUST BEFORE SUNUP.
PLUM'S DAIRY
YEP, AN' SAFE, TOO -- KNOWIN' THAT THOSE STINKIN' DIRE WRAITHS HAVE BEEN CLEARED OUTTA CLAIRTON.
PLUM'S
THEIR EXISTENCE WAS A BIT HARD TO SWALLOW -- 'TIL THE REVEREND WALKER INTRODUCED ME TA ROM. THAT BIG GALOOT'S ALL RIGHT!
EH? SOUNDS LIKE A JET GOIN' BY OVERHEAD.
PLUM'S
MIGHTY LOW, IF YOU ASK ME...
BUT THE SOUND PINEY HEARS COMES FROM NO LOW-FLYING AIRPLANE, AS HE IS ABOUT TO LEARN!
A HUMAN HAS SEEN US, FLIGHT LEADER. WHAT SHALL WE DO?
AN ORDER IS GIVEN.
ERADICATE HIM.
RAY BLASTERS FIRE.
IN LESS TIME THAN IT TAKES TO TELL, PINEY PLUM'S LIVELIHOOD IS ELIMINATED.
HE IS LUCKY THAT HE DOES NOT LOSE HIS LIFE, AS WELL...
PLUM'S DAIRY
3

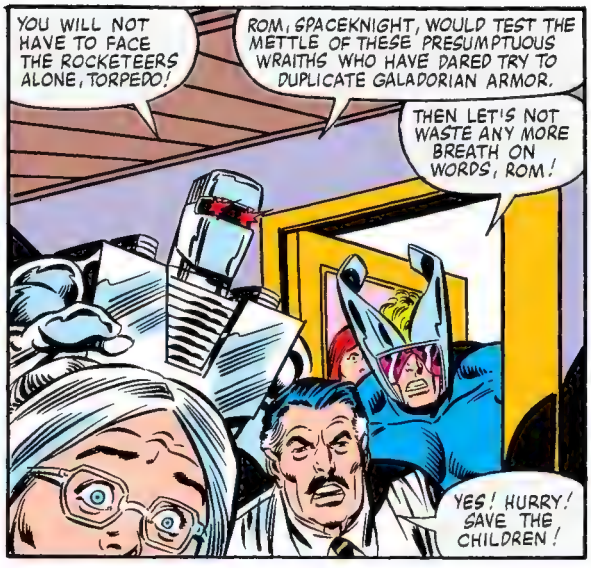

...WHICH HE MOST CERTAINLY WOULD IF THE ROCKETEERS KNEW THAT HE WAS NOT DEAD, BUT MERELY STUNNED SENSELESS.
THE ADDRESS WE SEEK IS NOT ON THIS STREET. INITIATE SEARCH PATTERN.
FIVE MINUTES LATER, THE SUN CLEARS THE HORIZON.
EACH DAY DAWNS MORE BEAUTIFULLY THAN THE LAST OVER CLAIRTON--
--BUT THIS DAY'S SPECIAL, ISN'T IT, BROCK DARLING?
EVERY DAY I SPEND WITH YOU IS, LORRY. BUT, YEAH, I KNOW WHAT YOU MEAN.
TODAY I START WORK AS CLAIRTON HIGH'S NEW FOOTBALL COACH.
I JUST THOUGHT I'D JOG OVER EARLY AND CHECK OUT THE FIELD. IT NEEDED FIXING--
--AFTER ROM AND I ALMOST DESTROYED IT LAST WEEK!
BUT HOW WAS I TO KNOW THAT ROM WAS CLAIRTON'S GUARDIAN? WHEN I TACKLED HIM IN MY TORPEDO SUIT, I ASSUMED HE WAS ONE OF THE INHUMAN ROCKETEERS WHO I HOPED TO ESCAPE BY MOVING TO CLAIRTON.
SINCE THEN I'VE LEARNED THAT MOST OF CLAIRTON KNOWS ABOUT ROM, IF NOT YET ABOUT ME.
HE'S TRAINING ME AS HIS REPLACEMENT SO THAT HE CAN RETURN TO GALADOR, HIS HOME PLANET.
BROCK'S RUN TAKES HIM OUT ONTO MAIN STREET WHERE SUDDENLY HE FINDS HIMSELF JOGGING ON...
MILK?
IT'S MR. PLUM! HE'S UNCONSCIOUS, AND HIS TRUCK'S BEEN DEMOLISHED!
4


FRANTIC MOMENTS LATER, IN THE JONES HOUSE, AFTER PINEY REVIVES AND EXPLAINS WHAT HAPPENED...
MOMMY, WE HEARD A NOISE!
IS IT TIME FOR SCHOOL ALREADY?
TAMMY, DANNY, COME DOWN QUIETLY. YOUR BREAKFAST IS IN THE KITCHEN. I'VE GOT TO TALK TO DADDY.
THAT'S RIGHT. ON MAIN STREET, A FEW MINUTES AGO. HOW SOON CAN YOU BE HERE?
BROCK JONES, YOU STOP DIALING THAT TELEPHONE AND TELL ME WHAT'S GOING ON AROUND HERE? WHO'S COMING OVER? WHAT HAPPENED ON MAIN STREET? AND WHY IS MR. PLUM SITTING SHAKING LIKE A LEAF IN OUR LIVING ROOM?
DING DONG
GET THE DOOR, WILL YOU HONEY?
YES, I'LL GET THE DOOR -- AND GIVE WHOEVER YOU'VE INVITED OVER AT 7 A.M. A PIECE OF MY...
...MIND?
A TERRIBLE WAY TO START THE DAY, I'M AFRAID, MRS. JONES.
BUT IT'LL BE OKAY, NOW! BROCK'S CALL ALERTED THE TOWN!
OH, STEVE -- LORRAINE DOESN'T SEEM TO UNDERSTAND WHY WE'RE HERE!
STEVE! BRANDY! ALL OF YOU! THANKS FOR COMING!
ROM TOLD ME THAT I COULD CALL ON YOU IF THERE WAS TROUBLE! I NEVER DREAMED THE TIME WOULD COME SO SOON!
I-I DON'T UNDERSTAND ANY OF THIS! WHY ARE OUR NEIGHBORS HERE? WHAT KIND OF TROUBLE MADE YOU CALL THEM?
AND WHO IS... ROM?
LORRAINE, I'VE BEEN MEANING TO TELL YOU...
5

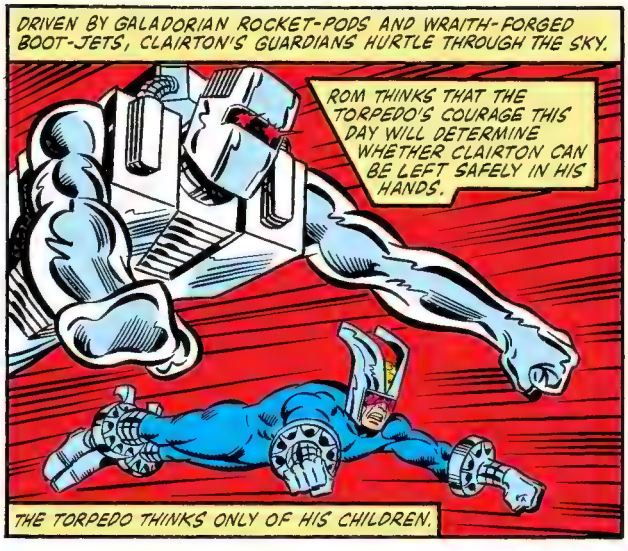

I AM ROM, MRS. JONES!
FOR A SECOND LORRAINE JONES CONSIDERS SCREAMING, AND THEN THINKS BETTER OF IT, NOT WANTING TO ALARM THE CHILDREN.
ALSO, THERE IS SOMETHING ABOUT THE SHINING SILVER STRANGER THAT IS ODDLY... REASSURING.
I SUMMONED ROM AND THE OTHERS BECAUSE THE DANGER THAT DROVE US TO MOVE TO CLAIRTON HAS FOLLOWED US HERE!
DANGER--? THEN YOU DIDN'T MOVE JUST TO COACH FOOTBALL?
NO, HONEY! I GRABBED YOU AND THE KIDS AND RAN TO THE QUIETEST, MOST OUT-OF-THE-WAY TOWN I COULD FIND, BECAUSE SOMEONE DISCOVERED THAT I WAS MORE THAN AN EX-FOOTBALL HERO SELLING INSURANCE!
SOMEONE LEARNED THAT I WAS ALSO... THE TORPEDO!
AND THAT SOMEONE SENT AN INHUMAN HORDE OF HIT-MEN TO KILL US ALL!
THOSE WHO WOULD HARM YOU ARE DIRE WRAITHS, MRS. JONES!
ALIENS WHO HAD INFESTED CLAIRTON BEFORE ROM DROVE THEM OUT!
THEY EMPLOYED A HUMAN SCIENTIST TO DEVELOP THE TORPEDO SUIT. THE SCIENTIST LEARNED THEIR TRUE NATURE, STOLE THE SUIT, AND FLED. OTHER HUMANS, UNWITTINGLY IN WRAITH EMPLOY, PURSUED AND KILLED HIM...
BUT NOT BEFORE HE'D GIVEN ME THE TORPEDO SUIT! I WAS BORED WITH SELLING INSURANCE, HONEY! I THOUGHT MY BEING A SUPER HERO WOULD BE EXCITING--WOULD MAKE YOU PROUD OF ME! INSTEAD, I'VE PLACED YOU AND THE KIDS IN DANGER!
ALL EARTH IS ENDANGERED BY THE DEADLY DIRE WRAITHS, MRS. JONES!
ROM'S COME TO SAVE US FROM THEM!
I STILL CAN'T UNDERSTAND HOW THE WRAITH ROCKETEERS TRACKED ME TO CLAIRTON! I TOLD NO ONE WE WERE MOVING HERE!
BUT I DID! I WROTE TO YOUR SISTER, MAGGIE, CARE OF HER JOB AT DELMAR INSURANCE!
THEN THE WRAITHS HAVE INFILTRATED DELMAR!
THAT IS THEIR WAY, TO PLACE THEMSELVES IN POSITIONS WHERE INFORMATION REGARDING THE FLOW OF HUMANITY PASSES THROUGH THEIR HANDS.
6

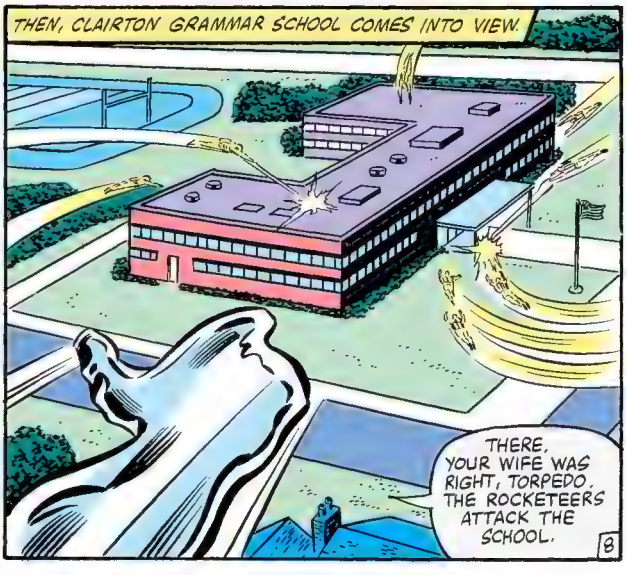

STEVE JACKSON TAKES BRANDY CLARK ASIDE...
SO CLAIRTON'S GOT A NEW GUARDIAN? DID YOU KNOW ABOUT THIS?
ROM TOLD ME A FEW NIGHTS AGO. I THINK HE REGARDS THE TORPEDO AS A KIND OF DEPUTY--
--WHO HE CAN LEAVE TO WATCH OVER CLAIRTON WHILE HE JOURNEYS HOME TO GALADOR.
SO GETTING HOME IS STILL ON OUR BIG BUDDY'S MIND?
Y-YES, EVER SINCE THE WRAITHS SHOWED HIM AN IMAGE OF GALADOR IN RUINS. ROM MUST LEARN IF THAT WAS REALITY... OR ILLUSION.
THEN, MR. TORPEDO, WELCOME TO CLAIRTON! WITH YOU TAKING ROM'S PLACE, I WON'T HAVE TO COMPETE FOR BRANDY'S LOVE--
--WITH A NOBLE, HEROIC CHAMPION OF THE DEFENSELESS WHO, WHEN ALL IS SAID AND DONE--
--STILL ISN'T HUMAN, BUT AN ALIEN MAN OF METAL!
ALL RIGHT, I SUGGEST WE BEGIN SEARCHING FOR THE ROCKETEERS!
THEY'RE WRAITHS, JONATHAN! THEY COULD HAVE DISGUISED THEMSELVES AS ANYONE BY NOW!
VREEOW
REVEREND! MR. CLARK! DO YOU HEAR THAT SOUND COMING FROM OUTSIDE?
YES! AND ALONG WITH IT, THE SCREAMS OF FRIGHTENED CHILDREN!
CHILDREN? OH, MY LORD! I TOLD THE CHILDREN TO GET DRESSED AND GET READY FOR SCHOOL!
AS DID EVERY OTHER MOTHER IN CLAIRTON--
"--WHICH, I'M AFRAID, HAS MADE CLAIRTON'S CHILDREN PRIME TARGETS FOR THE ROCKETEERS!"
RUN! THEY'RE AFTER US!
VREEOW
FRZAP
RUN FROM THE FLYING MEN!
MOMMY! DADDY! HELP!
7

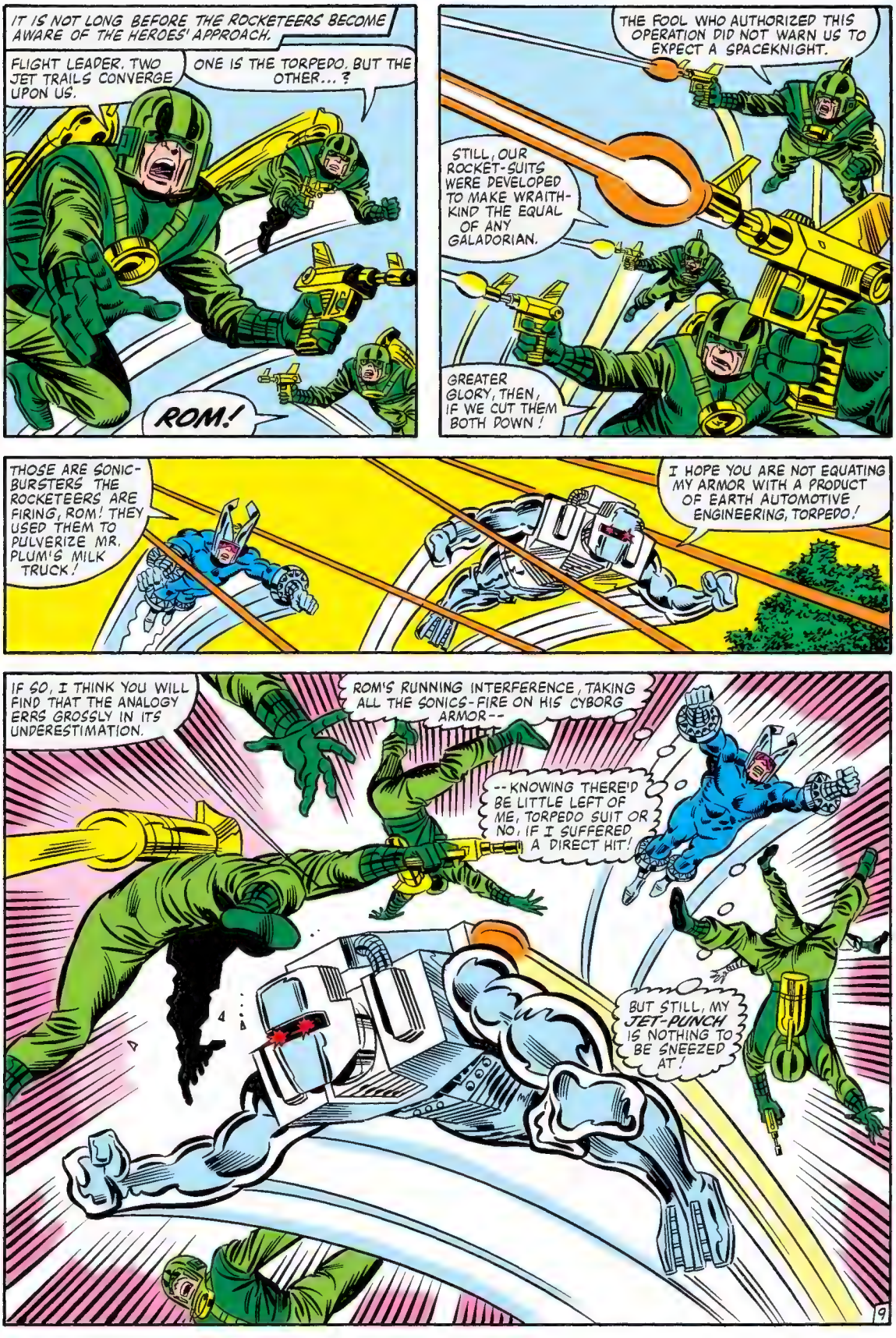
THE ROCKETEERS MUST'VE GROWN TIRED OF LOOKING FOR ME AND DECIDED TO FLUSH ME OUT OF HIDING!
OH, BROCK -- THEY'VE ATTACKED THE SCHOOL! OUR CHILDREN ARE THERE!
TAMMY! DANNY! I'VE GOT TO SAVE THEM!

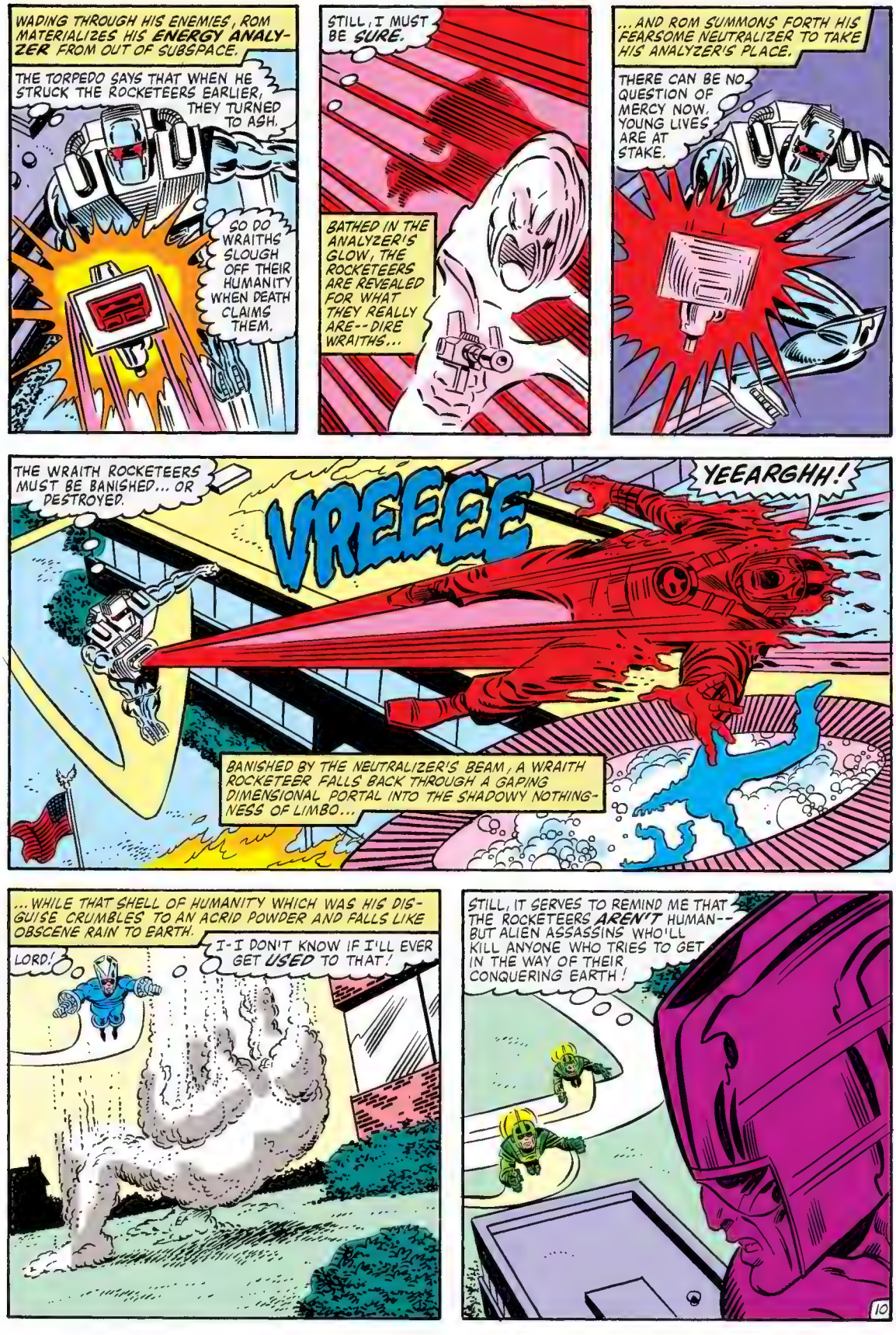

YOU WILL NOT HAVE TO FACE THE ROCKETEERS ALONE, TORPEDO!
ROM, SPACEKNIGHT, WOULD TEST THE METTLE OF THESE PRESUMPTUOUS WRAITHS WHO HAVE DARED TRY TO DUPLICATE GALADORIAN ARMOR.
THEN LET'S NOT WASTE ANY MORE BREATH ON WORDS, ROM!
YES! HURRY! SAVE THE CHILDREN!

HAVE NO FEAR ON THAT SCORE, JONATHAN CLARK! NOT A SINGLE CHILD SHALL SUFFER HARM!
NOT IF ROM AND THE TORPEDO CAN HELP IT!

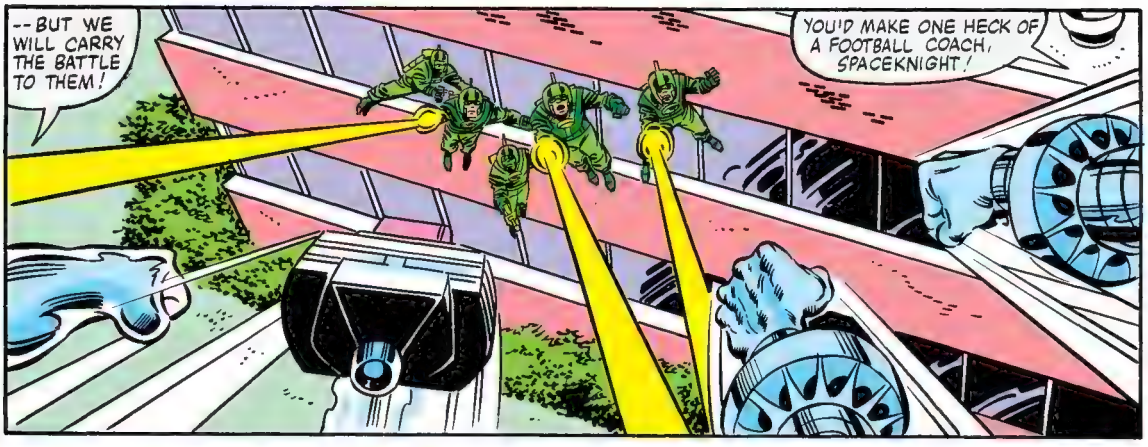

DRIVEN BY GALADORIAN ROCKET-PODS AND WRAITH-FORGED BOOT-JETS, CLAIRTON'S GUARDIANS HURTLE THROUGH THE SKY.
ROM THINKS THAT THE TORPEDO'S COURAGE THIS DAY WILL DETERMINE WHETHER CLAIRTON CAN BE LEFT SAFELY IN HIS HANDS.
THE TORPEDO THINKS ONLY OF HIS CHILDREN.


THEN, CLAIRTON GRAMMAR SCHOOL COMES INTO VIEW.
THERE, YOUR WIFE WAS RIGHT, TORPEDO. THE ROCKETEERS ATTACK THE SCHOOL.
8

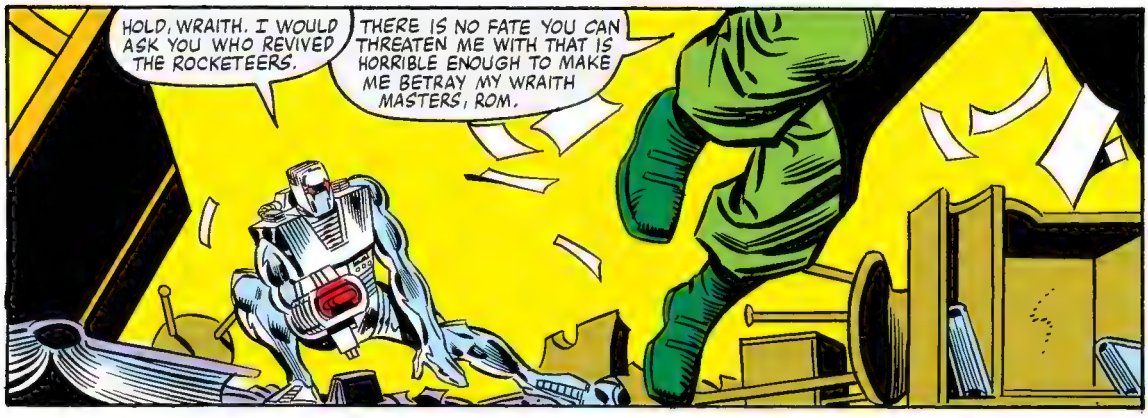

IT IS NOT LONG BEFORE THE ROCKETEERS BECOME AWARE OF THE HEROES' APPROACH.
FLIGHT LEADER, TWO JET TRAILS CONVERGE UPON US.
ONE IS THE TORPEDO, BUT THE OTHER...?
ROM!
THE FOOL WHO AUTHORIZED THIS OPERATION DID NOT WARN US TO EXPECT A SPACEKNIGHT.
STILL, OUR ROCKET-SUITS WERE DEVELOPED TO MAKE WRAITH-KIND THE EQUAL OF ANY GALADORIAN.
GREATER GLORY, THEN, IF WE CUT THEM BOTH DOWN!
THOSE ARE SONIC-BURSTERS THE ROCKETEERS ARE FIRING, ROM! THEY USED THEM TO PULVERIZE MR. PLUM'S MILK TRUCK!
I HOPE YOU ARE NOT EQUATING MY ARMOR WITH A PRODUCT OF EARTH AUTOMOTIVE ENGINEERING, TORPEDO!
IF SO, I THINK YOU WILL FIND THAT THE ANALOGY ERRS GROSSLY IN ITS UNDERESTIMATION.
ROM'S RUNNING INTERFERENCE, TAKING ALL THE SONICS-FIRE ON HIS CYBORG ARMOR--
--KNOWING THERE'D BE LITTLE LEFT OF ME, TORPEDO SUIT OR NO, IF I SUFFERED A DIRECT HIT!
BUT STILL, MY JET-PUNCH IS NOTHING TO BE SNEEZED AT!
9

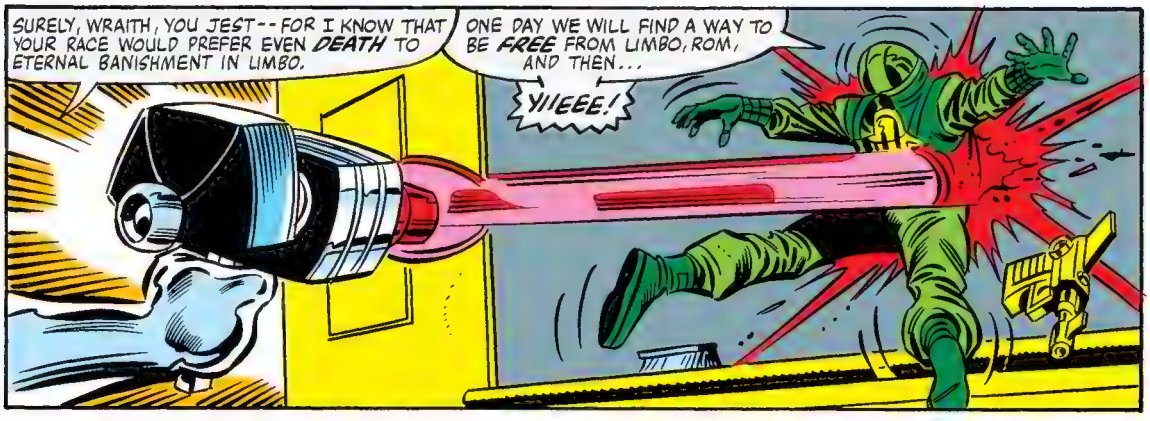

WADING THROUGH HIS ENEMIES, ROM MATERIALIZES HIS ENERGY ANALYZER FROM OUT OF SUBSPACE.
THE TORPEDO SAYS THAT WHEN HE STRUCK THE ROCKETEERS EARLIER, THEY TURNED TO ASH.
SO DO WRAITHS SLOUGH OFF THEIR HUMANITY WHEN DEATH CLAIMS THEM.
STILL, I MUST BE SURE.
BATHED IN THE ANALYZER'S GLOW, THE ROCKETEERS ARE REVEALED FOR WHAT THEY REALLY ARE--DIRE WRAITHS...
...AND ROM SUMMONS FORTH HIS FEARSOME NEUTRALIZER TO TAKE HIS ANALYZER'S PLACE.
THERE CAN BE NO QUESTION OF MERCY NOW, YOUNG LIVES ARE AT STAKE.
THE WRAITH ROCKETEERS MUST BE BANISHED... OR DESTROYED.
VREEEE
YEEARGHH!
BANISHED BY THE NEUTRALIZER'S BEAM, A WRAITH ROCKETEER FALLS BACK THROUGH A GAPING DIMENSIONAL PORTAL INTO THE SHADOWY NOTHINGNESS OF LIMBO...
...WHILE THAT SHELL OF HUMANITY WHICH WAS HIS DISGUISE CRUMBLES TO AN ACRID POWDER AND FALLS LIKE OBSCENE RAIN TO EARTH.
LORD!
I-I DON'T KNOW IF I'LL EVER GET USED TO THAT!
STILL, IT SERVES TO REMIND ME THAT THE ROCKETEERS AREN'T HUMAN--BUT ALIEN ASSASSINS WHO'LL KILL ANYONE WHO TRIES TO GET IN THE WAY OF THEIR CONQUERING EARTH!
10

THAT MAKES WHAT I'VE GOT TO DO JUST A LITTLE BIT EASIER!
THE TORPEDO SOARS TOWARDS US.
HE OUTFLIES OUR SONICS BURSTS!
THAT'S RIGHT, WRAITH! I'M FASTER! I HIT HARDER!
SHSKROW!
HISSSSHHH
AND I'M HUMAN!
I GUESS THAT MAKES ALL THE DIFFERENCE!
THE TORPEDO WEARS THE PROTOTYPE SUIT--COMPARED TO WHICH OURS ARE BUT PALE IMITATIONS. HOW CAN WE MATCH OURSELVES AGAINST BOTH HIM AND ROM?
WHAT WE LACK IN POWER, WE MUST MAKE UP IN WEAPONRY--AND NUMBERS.
THE WRAITH ROCKETEERS ARE REGROUPING FOR A BLITZ, ROM!
LIKE COWARDS EVERYWHERE, THE SPACE-SCUM SEEK STRENGTH IN NUMBERS. THEY HOPE TO OVERWHELM US WITH ONE CONCERTED ATTACK--

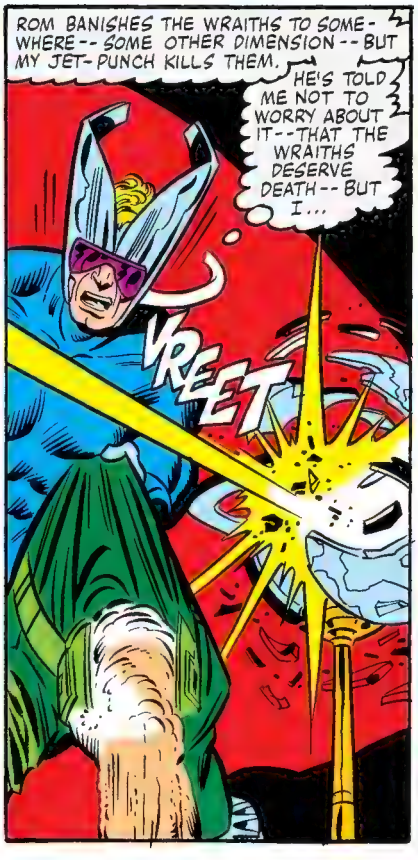

--BUT WE WILL CARRY THE BATTLE TO THEM!
YOU'D MAKE ONE HECK OF A FOOTBALL COACH, SPACEKNIGHT!

THE TORPEDO CAN ALMOST HEAR THE ROAR OF THE CROWD, THE CHANT OF THE CHEERLEADERS IN HIS EARS AS HE AND ROM STREAK DOWNWARD AND SMASH THE STUNNED ROCKETEERS THROUGH THE UPPER-STORY WINDOWS OF THE CLAIRTON GRAMMAR SCHOOL.
THERE, AMIDST DIMINUTIVE DESKS AND CHAIRS, THE FORMER FOOTBALL PRO KNOWS HE WILL PLAY HIS GREATEST GAME--NOT FOR FORTUNE OR FAME OR FOR A TOUCHDOWN SCORED...
324 x 8 2592
324 x 8 = 2592
3(100) + 2(10) +
x 8(1) =
00 + 5(100) +
0) + 2(1)
B I C
GUIDO LOVES CAROL
...BUT FOR THE SAKE OF A TOWN HE NOW CALLS HIS HOME, A SPACEKNIGHT HE HAS COME TO REGARD AS HIS FRIEND, AND FOR THE SALVATION OF HIS PLANET, EARTH!
12


HOLD, WRAITH. I WOULD ASK YOU WHO REVIVED THE ROCKETEERS.
THERE IS NO FATE YOU CAN THREATEN ME WITH THAT IS HORRIBLE ENOUGH TO MAKE ME BETRAY MY WRAITH MASTERS, ROM.

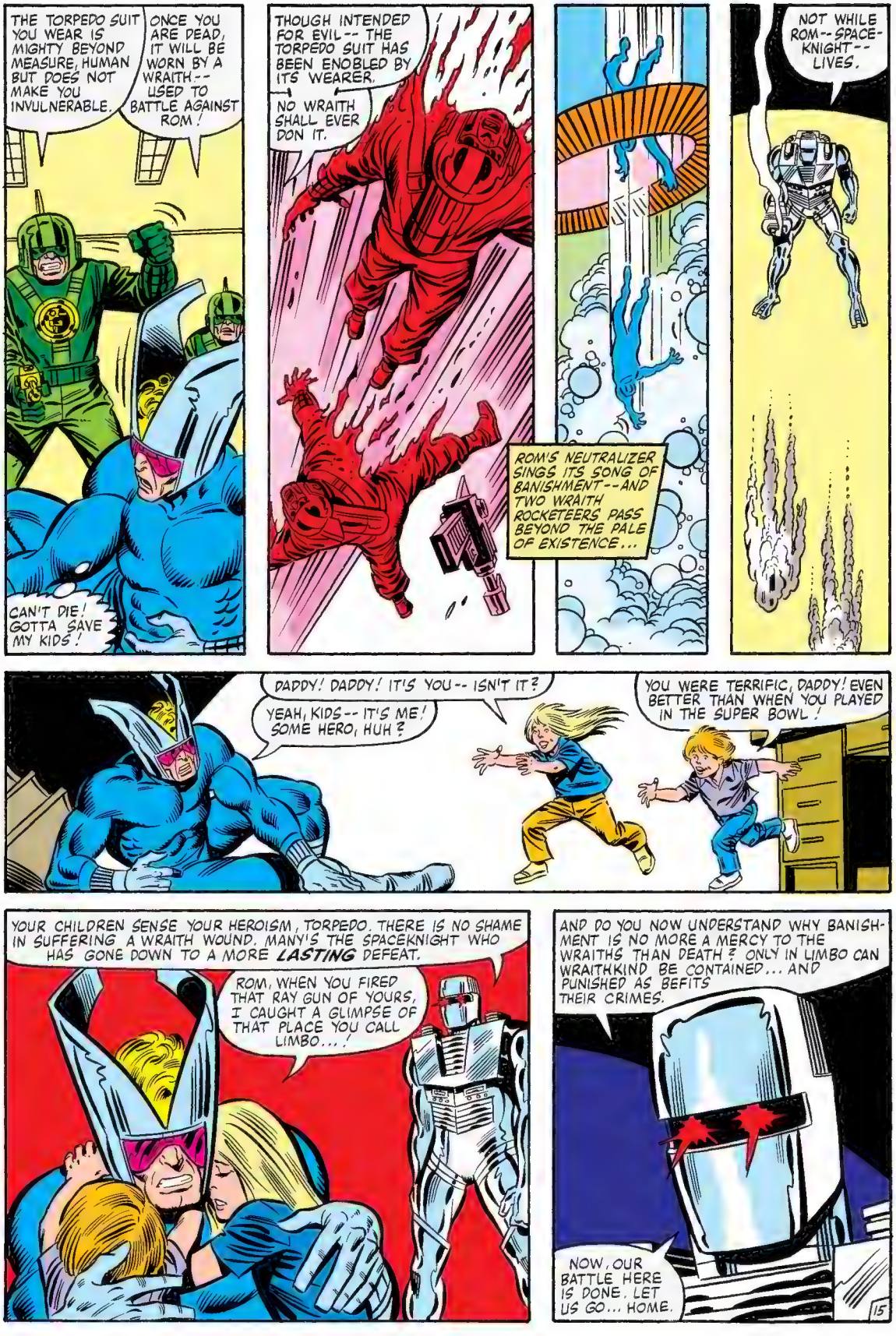

SURELY, WRAITH, YOU JEST -- FOR I KNOW THAT YOUR RACE WOULD PREFER EVEN DEATH TO ETERNAL BANISHMENT IN LIMBO.
ONE DAY WE WILL FIND A WAY TO BE FREE FROM LIMBO, ROM, AND THEN...
YIIEEE!

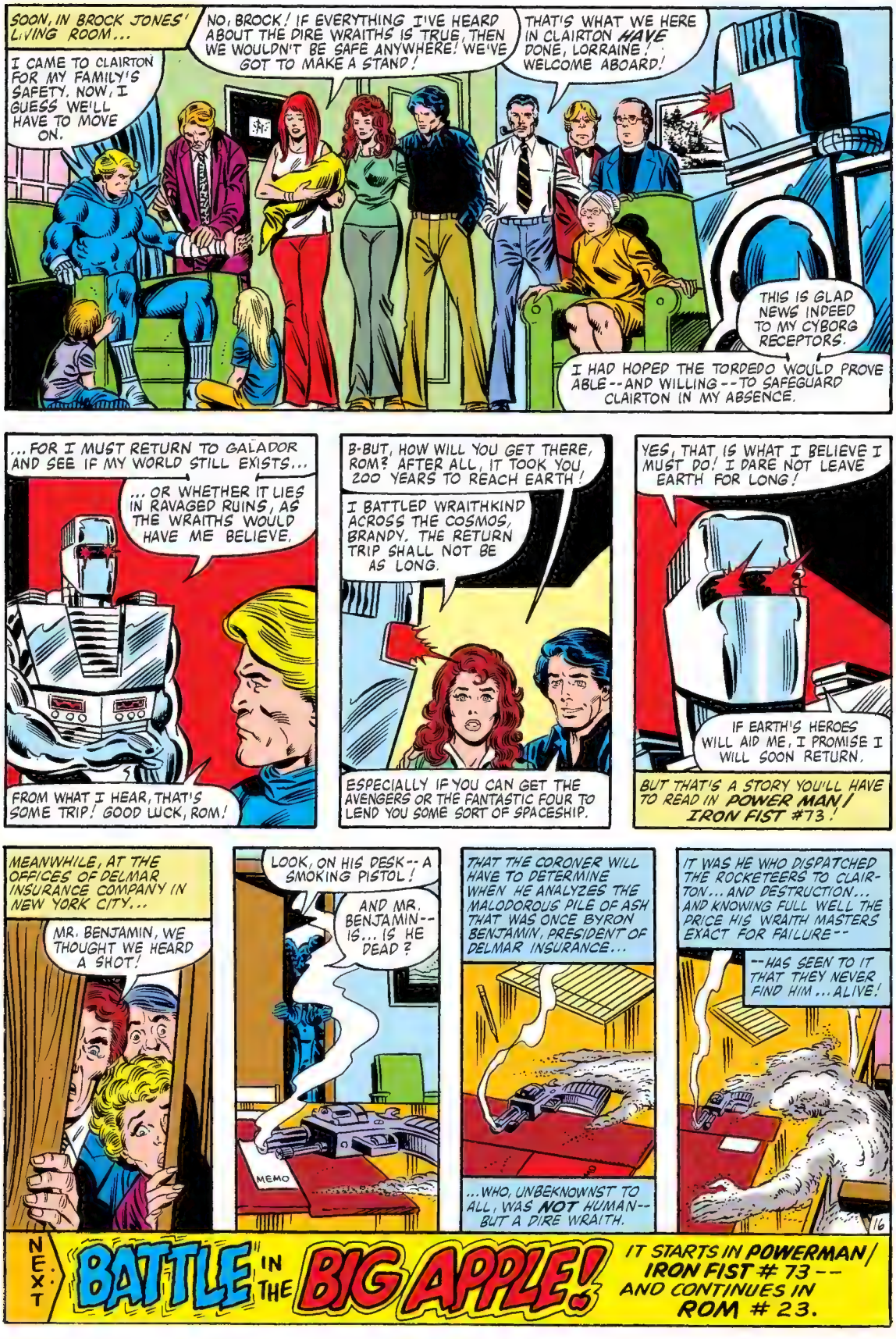
I EXIST TO SEE THAT SUCH A TIME NEVER COMES, WRAITH!
HISTORY ASSIGNMEN
PAGES 241-
243 THE
RISE AN
FALL O
ROME

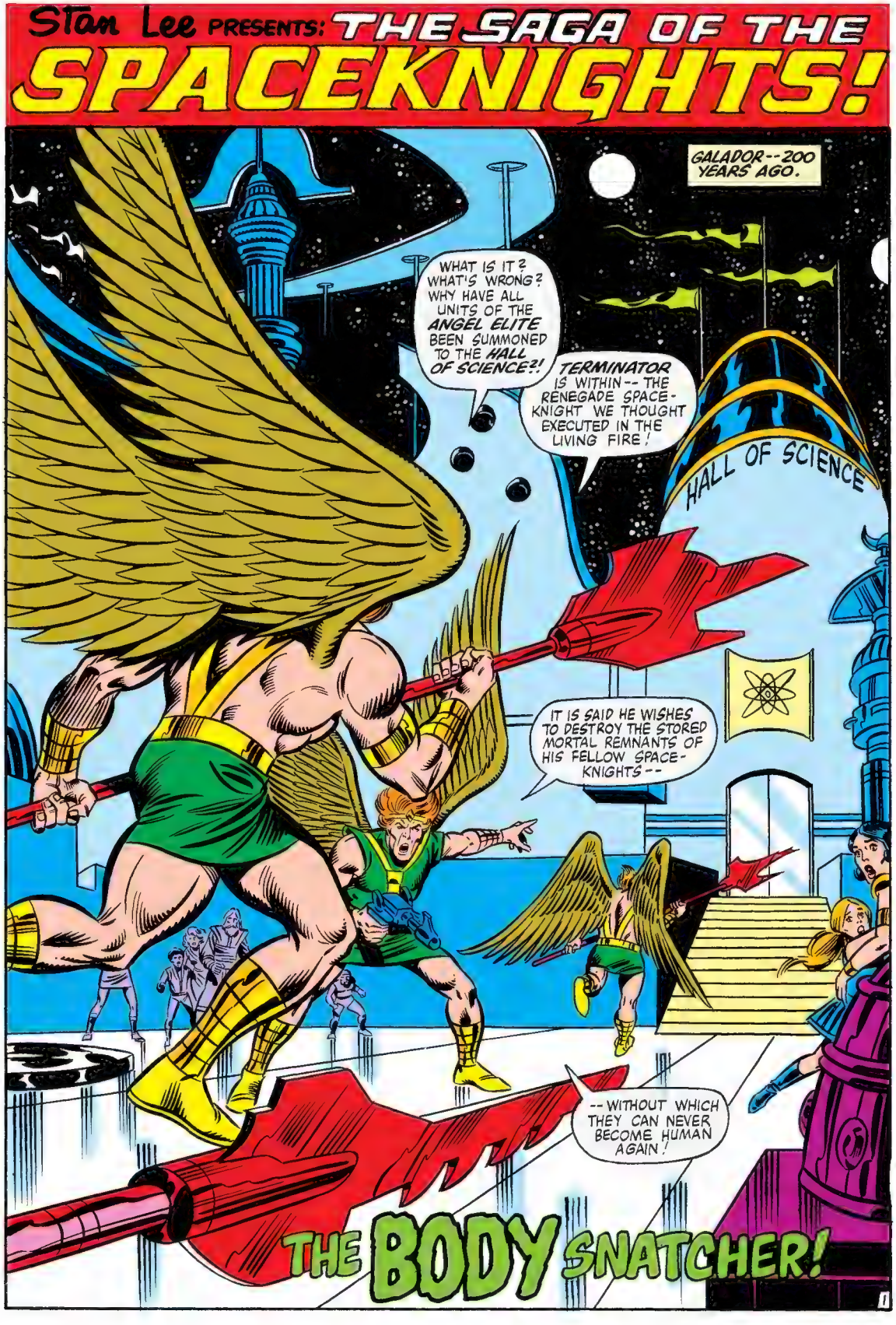

ROM BANISHES THE WRAITHS TO SOME-WHERE -- SOME OTHER DIMENSION -- BUT MY JET-PUNCH KILLS THEM.
HE'S TOLD ME NOT TO WORRY ABOUT IT -- THAT THE WRAITHS DESERVE DEATH -- BUT I...
VREET

WE WERE SENT TO RETRIEVE THE TORPEDO SUIT, HUMAN -- BUT IF WE CANNOT HAVE IT, THEN NO ONE SHALL.
THEY TRIED TO KILL ME! THIS IS A WAR, ALL RIGHT, BETWEEN THEM AND EARTH!
13

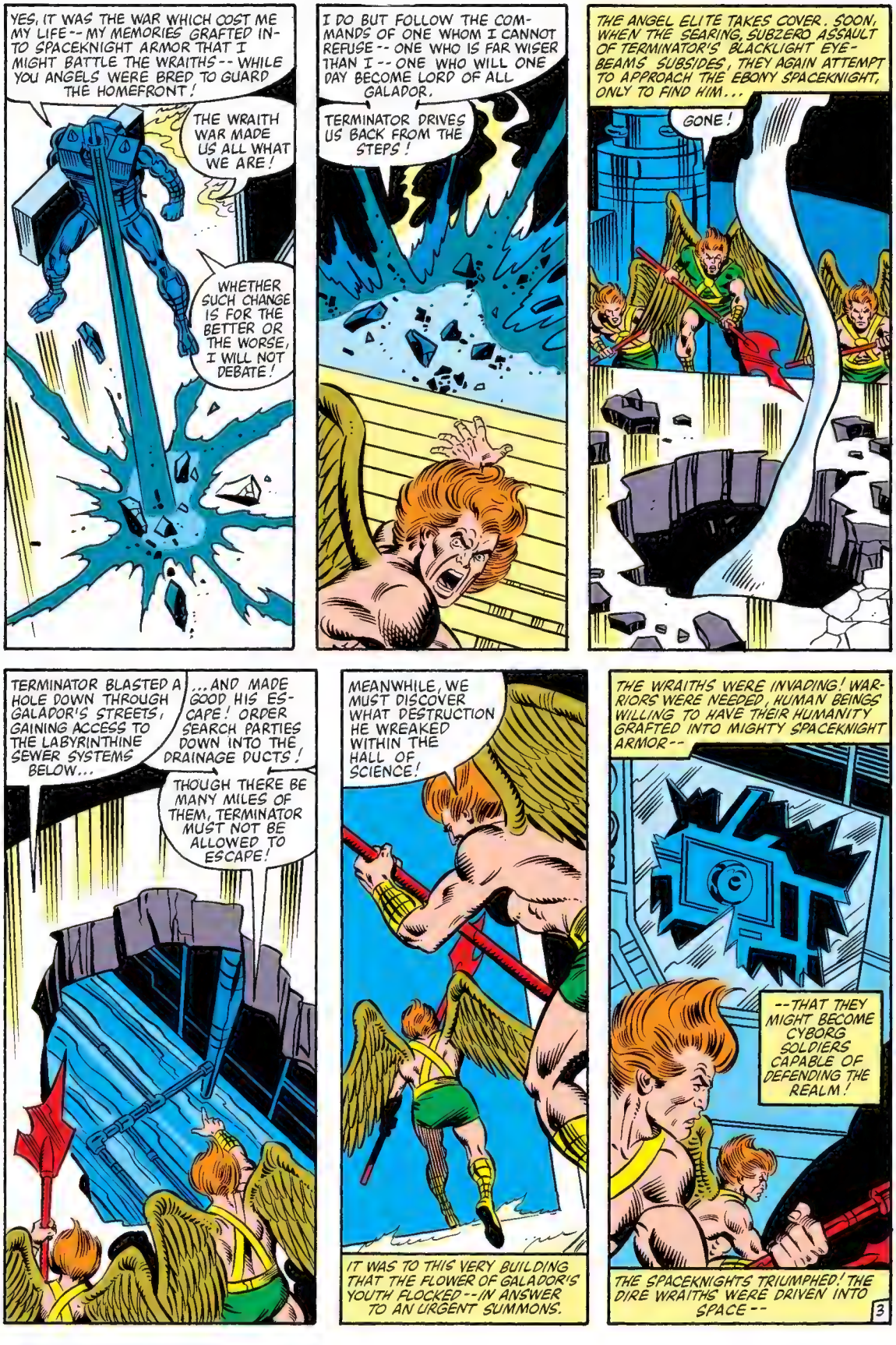
AND IN WAR THERE'S NO PLACE FOR FAINT HEARTS--
--NO PLACE FOR MERCY!
THE TORPEDO SCREAMS TOWARDS THE ROCKETEERS AT FULL JET-THRUST, AVOIDING THEIR SONICS BLASTS, ABOUT TO JET-PUNCH THEM OUT OF EXISTENCE, WHEN HE SEES...
KIDS! MY KIDS--HIDING UNDER THE DESK!
SPELL
CAT
GIRL
ABC
CAROL HOPE
2 +2 4
I-IF I STRIKE AT THE ROCKETEERS WITH MY FULL JET-POWER THE JET SHOCK MIGHT KILL OR CRIPPLE MY KIDS!
I CAN'T TAKE THAT CHANCE! I HAVE TO UNLEASH THE JET-POWER MY TORPEDO SUIT HAS BUILT UP...
SKROW!
UNNHH!
I LEFT MYSELF WIDE OPEN!
I'M WOUNDED!
VREEOW!
THUD!
AND IT LOOKS LIKE I'VE BEEN INTERCEPTED IN THE OTHER TEAM'S TERRITORY!
14

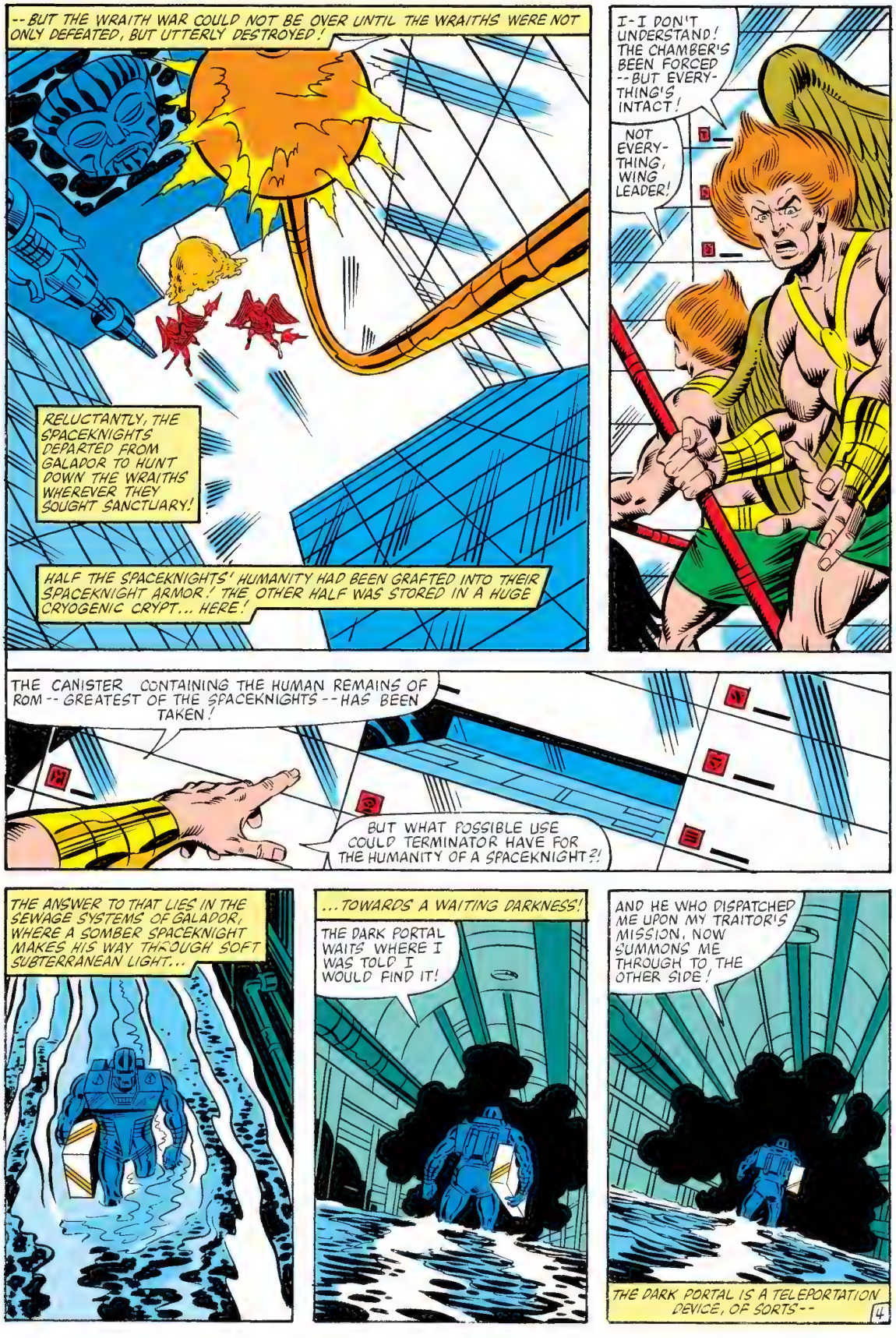

THE TORPEDO SUIT YOU WEAR IS MIGHTY BEYOND MEASURE, HUMAN BUT DOES NOT MAKE YOU INVULNERABLE.
ONCE YOU ARE DEAD, IT WILL BE WORN BY A WRAITH-- USED TO BATTLE AGAINST ROM!
CAN'T DIE! GOTTA SAVE MY KIDS!
THOUGH INTENDED FOR EVIL-- THE TORPEDO SUIT HAS BEEN ENOBLED BY ITS WEARER.
NO WRAITH SHALL EVER DON IT.
ROM'S NEUTRALIZER SINGS ITS SONG OF BANISHMENT--AND TWO WRAITH ROCKETEERS PASS BEYOND THE PALE OF EXISTENCE...
NOT WHILE ROM--SPACE-KNIGHT--LIVES.
DADDY! DADDY! IT'S YOU-- ISN'T IT?
YEAH, KIDS-- IT'S ME! SOME HERO, HUH?
YOU WERE TERRIFIC, DADDY! EVEN BETTER THAN WHEN YOU PLAYED IN THE SUPER BOWL!
YOUR CHILDREN SENSE YOUR HEROISM, TORPEDO. THERE IS NO SHAME IN SUFFERING A WRAITH WOUND. MANY'S THE SPACEKNIGHT WHO HAS GONE DOWN TO A MORE LASTING DEFEAT.
ROM, WHEN YOU FIRED THAT RAY GUN OF YOURS, I CAUGHT A GLIMPSE OF THAT PLACE YOU CALL LIMBO...!
AND DO YOU NOW UNDERSTAND WHY BANISHMENT IS NO MORE A MERCY TO THE WRAITHS THAN DEATH? ONLY IN LIMBO CAN WRAITHKIND BE CONTAINED... AND PUNISHED AS BEFITS THEIR CRIMES.
NOW, OUR BATTLE HERE IS DONE. LET US GO... HOME.
15


SOON, IN BROCK JONES' LIVING ROOM...
I CAME TO CLAIRTON FOR MY FAMILY'S SAFETY. NOW, I GUESS WE'LL HAVE TO MOVE ON.
NO, BROCK! IF EVERYTHING I'VE HEARD ABOUT THE DIRE WRAITHS IS TRUE, THEN WE WOULDN'T BE SAFE ANYWHERE! WE'VE GOT TO MAKE A STAND!
THAT'S WHAT WE HERE IN CLAIRTON HAVE DONE, LORRAINE! WELCOME ABOARD!
THIS IS GLAD NEWS INDEED TO MY CYBORG RECEPTORS.
I HAD HOPED THE TORPEDO WOULD PROVE ABLE--AND WILLING--TO SAFEGUARD CLAIRTON IN MY ABSENCE.
...FOR I MUST RETURN TO GALADOR AND SEE IF MY WORLD STILL EXISTS...
...OR WHETHER IT LIES IN RAVAGED RUINS, AS THE WRAITHS WOULD HAVE ME BELIEVE.
FROM WHAT I HEAR, THAT'S SOME TRIP! GOOD LUCK, ROM!
B-BUT, HOW WILL YOU GET THERE, ROM? AFTER ALL, IT TOOK YOU 200 YEARS TO REACH EARTH!
I BATTLED WRAITHKIND ACROSS THE COSMOS, BRANDY. THE RETURN TRIP SHALL NOT BE AS LONG.
ESPECIALLY IF YOU CAN GET THE AVENGERS OR THE FANTASTIC FOUR TO LEND YOU SOME SORT OF SPACESHIP.
YES, THAT IS WHAT I BELIEVE I MUST DO! I DARE NOT LEAVE EARTH FOR LONG!
IF EARTH'S HEROES WILL AID ME, I PROMISE I WILL SOON RETURN.
BUT THAT'S A STORY YOU'LL HAVE TO READ IN POWER MAN/ IRON FIST #73!
MEANWHILE, AT THE OFFICES OF DELMAR INSURANCE COMPANY IN NEW YORK CITY...
MR. BENJAMIN, WE THOUGHT WE HEARD A SHOT!
LOOK, ON HIS DESK--A SMOKING PISTOL!
AND MR. BENJAMIN--IS... IS HE DEAD?
MEMO
THAT THE CORONER WILL HAVE TO DETERMINE WHEN HE ANALYZES THE MALODOROUS PILE OF ASH THAT WAS ONCE BYRON BENJAMIN, PRESIDENT OF DELMAR INSURANCE...
...WHO, UNBEKNOWNST TO ALL, WAS NOT HUMAN--BUT A DIRE WRAITH.
IT WAS HE WHO DISPATCHED THE ROCKETEERS TO CLAIRTON... AND DESTRUCTION... AND KNOWING FULL WELL THE PRICE HIS WRAITH MASTERS EXACT FOR FAILURE--
--HAS SEEN TO IT THAT THEY NEVER FIND HIM... ALIVE!
16
NEXT: BATTLE IN THE BIG APPLE!
IT STARTS IN POWERMAN/ IRON FIST # 73 -- AND CONTINUES IN ROM # 23.


Stan Lee PRESENTS: THE SAGA OF THE SPACEKNIGHTS!
GALADOR--200 YEARS AGO.
WHAT IS IT? WHAT'S WRONG? WHY HAVE ALL UNITS OF THE ANGEL ELITE BEEN SUMMONED TO THE HALL OF SCIENCE?!
TERMINATOR IS WITHIN-- THE RENEGADE SPACE-KNIGHT WE THOUGHT EXECUTED IN THE LIVING FIRE!
HALL OF SCIENCE
IT IS SAID HE WISHES TO DESTROY THE STORED MORTAL REMNANTS OF HIS FELLOW SPACE-KNIGHTS--
--WITHOUT WHICH THEY CAN NEVER BECOME HUMAN AGAIN!
THE BODY SNATCHER!

THERE IS A SEEMING ANOMALY HERE: GALADOR WAS EVER A PARADISE PLANET, KNOWING NEITHER HUNGER NOR WANT, CRIME NOR STRIFE.
WHY, THEN, DID GALADOR'S PRIME DIRECTOR ORDER THE GENETIC-BREEDING OF THE HOME-GUARD ANGEL ELITE?
COULD IT BE THAT, IN SOME UNFATHOMABLE FASHION, HE KNEW BEFOREHAND THAT A SITUATION SUCH AS THIS WOULD OCCUR?
BACK! THE BRAZEN DOORS WHICH TERMINATOR SEALED FROM WITHIN ARE BURSTING OUTWARDS!
SHROOM
WHAT MY BLACKLIGHT EYEBEAMS CAN SEAL-- THEY CAN UNSEAL!
LET NONE BAR MY WAY! I HAVE THAT WHICH I CAME FOR--
ROM
--AND WOULD NOW LEAVE WITH IT UN-HINDERED!
ROM
THE RENEGADE BEARS A CANISTER FROM THE CRYOGENIC CHAMBER!
HE COULD NOT HAVE ATTAINED IT--
--UNLESS HE HAD FIRST DESTROYED THE ANGEL ELITE UNIT STANDING GUARD WITHIN THE SCIENCE HALL!
INDEED I DID, WINGED ONE-- FOR THEY, TOO, SOUGHT TO STOP ME!
I WAS CONDEMNED FOR MY LACK OF MERCY, FOR THE UNBRIDLED KILLING URGE THAT OFTTIMES CAME UPON ME! IT IS WITH ME NOW, AND THUS I AM AFRAID THAT YOU, TOO, MUST DIE!
AIIEE!
GALADORIAN SLAYING GALADORIAN? NEVER HAS SUCH A THING COME TO PASS!
2


YES, IT WAS THE WAR WHICH COST ME MY LIFE -- MY MEMORIES GRAFTED INTO SPACEKNIGHT ARMOR THAT I MIGHT BATTLE THE WRAITHS -- WHILE YOU ANGELS WERE BRED TO GUARD THE HOMEFRONT!
THE WRAITH WAR MADE US ALL WHAT WE ARE!
WHETHER SUCH CHANGE IS FOR THE BETTER OR THE WORSE, I WILL NOT DEBATE!
I DO BUT FOLLOW THE COMMANDS OF ONE WHOM I CANNOT REFUSE -- ONE WHO IS FAR WISER THAN I -- ONE WHO WILL ONE DAY BECOME LORD OF ALL GALADOR.
TERMINATOR DRIVES US BACK FROM THE STEPS!
THE ANGEL ELITE TAKES COVER. SOON, WHEN THE SEARING, SUBZERO ASSAULT OF TERMINATOR'S BLACKLIGHT EYE-BEAMS SUBSIDES, THEY AGAIN ATTEMPT TO APPROACH THE EBONY SPACEKNIGHT, ONLY TO FIND HIM...
GONE!
TERMINATOR BLASTED A HOLE DOWN THROUGH GALADOR'S STREETS, GAINING ACCESS TO THE LABYRINTHINE SEWER SYSTEMS BELOW...
...AND MADE GOOD HIS ESCAPE! ORDER SEARCH PARTIES DOWN INTO THE DRAINAGE DUCTS!
THOUGH THERE BE MANY MILES OF THEM, TERMINATOR MUST NOT BE ALLOWED TO ESCAPE!
MEANWHILE, WE MUST DISCOVER WHAT DESTRUCTION HE WREAKED WITHIN THE HALL OF SCIENCE!
IT WAS TO THIS VERY BUILDING THAT THE FLOWER OF GALADOR'S YOUTH FLOCKED -- IN ANSWER TO AN URGENT SUMMONS.
THE WRAITHS WERE INVADING! WARRIORS WERE NEEDED, HUMAN BEINGS WILLING TO HAVE THEIR HUMANITY GRAFTED INTO MIGHTY SPACEKNIGHT ARMOR --
--THAT THEY MIGHT BECOME CYBORG SOLDIERS CAPABLE OF DEFENDING THE REALM!
THE SPACEKNIGHTS TRIUMPHED! THE DIRE WRAITHS WERE DRIVEN INTO SPACE --
3


--BUT THE WRAITH WAR COULD NOT BE OVER UNTIL THE WRAITHS WERE NOT ONLY DEFEATED, BUT UTTERLY DESTROYED!
RELUCTANTLY, THE SPACEKNIGHTS DEPARTED FROM GALADOR TO HUNT DOWN THE WRAITHS WHEREVER THEY SOUGHT SANCTUARY!
HALF THE SPACEKNIGHTS' HUMANITY HAD BEEN GRAFTED INTO THEIR SPACEKNIGHT ARMOR! THE OTHER HALF WAS STORED IN A HUGE CRYOGENIC CRYPT... HERE!
I-I DON'T UNDERSTAND! THE CHAMBER'S BEEN FORCED --BUT EVERY-THING'S INTACT!
NOT EVERY-THING, WING LEADER!
THE CANISTER CONTAINING THE HUMAN REMAINS OF ROM -- GREATEST OF THE SPACEKNIGHTS -- HAS BEEN TAKEN!
BUT WHAT POSSIBLE USE COULD TERMINATOR HAVE FOR THE HUMANITY OF A SPACEKNIGHT?!
THE ANSWER TO THAT LIES IN THE SEWAGE SYSTEMS OF GALADOR, WHERE A SOMBER SPACEKNIGHT MAKES HIS WAY THROUGH SOFT SUBTERRANEAN LIGHT...
...TOWARDS A WAITING DARKNESS!
THE DARK PORTAL WAITS WHERE I WAS TOLD I WOULD FIND IT!
AND HE WHO DISPATCHED ME UPON MY TRAITOR'S MISSION, NOW SUMMONS ME THROUGH TO THE OTHER SIDE!
THE DARK PORTAL IS A TELEPORTATION DEVICE, OF SORTS--
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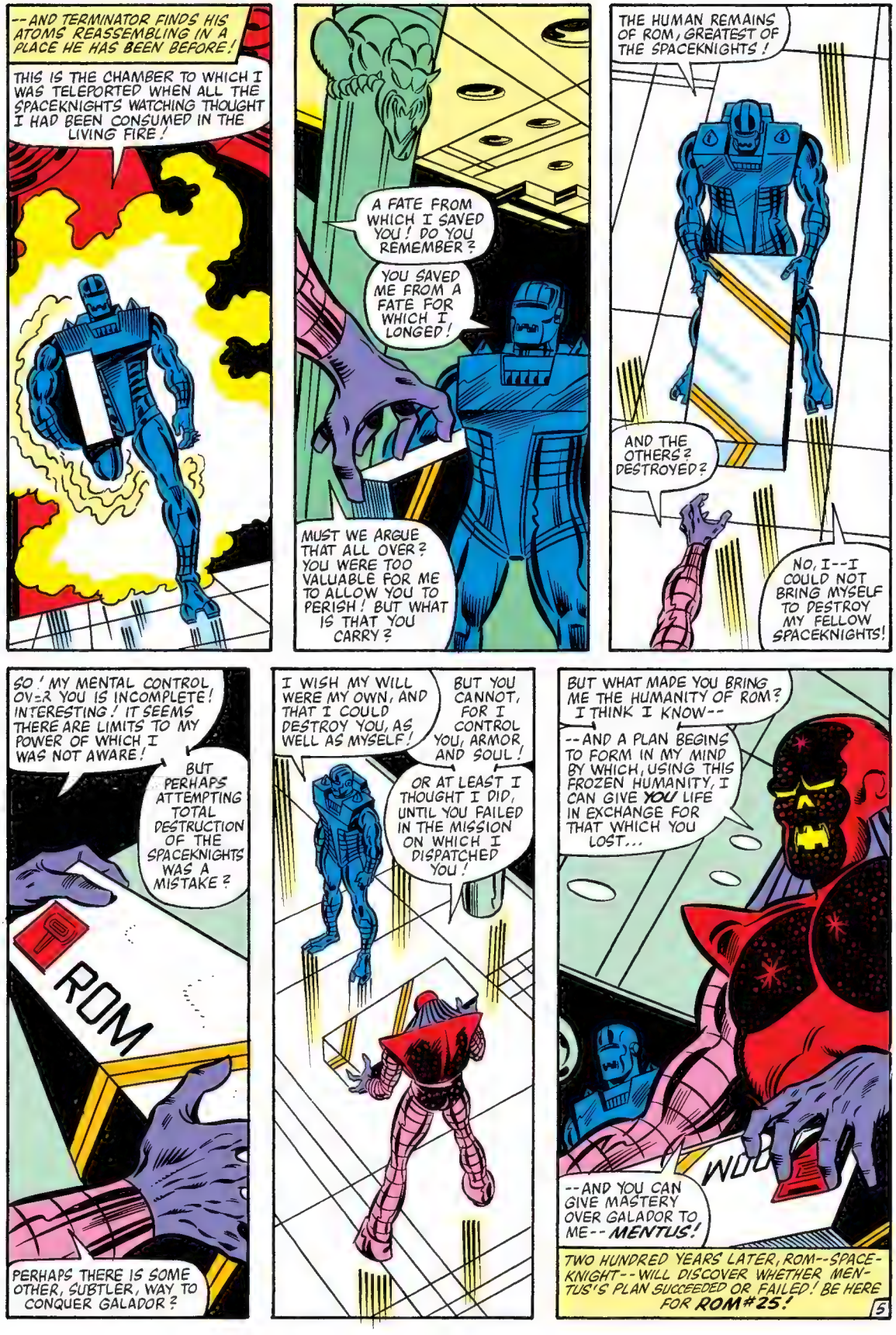
--AND TERMINATOR FINDS HIS ATOMS REASSEMBLING IN A PLACE HE HAS BEEN BEFORE!
THIS IS THE CHAMBER TO WHICH I WAS TELEPORTED WHEN ALL THE SPACEKNIGHTS WATCHING THOUGHT I HAD BEEN CONSUMED IN THE LIVING FIRE!
A FATE FROM WHICH I SAVED YOU! DO YOU REMEMBER?
YOU SAVED ME FROM A FATE FOR WHICH I LONGED!
MUST WE ARGUE THAT ALL OVER? YOU WERE TOO VALUABLE FOR ME TO ALLOW YOU TO PERISH! BUT WHAT IS THAT YOU CARRY?
THE HUMAN REMAINS OF ROM, GREATEST OF THE SPACEKNIGHTS!
AND THE OTHERS? DESTROYED?
NO, I--I COULD NOT BRING MYSELF TO DESTROY MY FELLOW SPACEKNIGHTS!
SO! MY MENTAL CONTROL OVER YOU IS INCOMPLETE! INTERESTING! IT SEEMS THERE ARE LIMITS TO MY POWER OF WHICH I WAS NOT AWARE!
BUT PERHAPS ATTEMPTING TOTAL DESTRUCTION OF THE SPACEKNIGHTS WAS A MISTAKE?
ROM
PERHAPS THERE IS SOME OTHER, SUBTLER, WAY TO CONQUER GALADOR?
I WISH MY WILL WERE MY OWN, AND THAT I COULD DESTROY YOU, AS WELL AS MYSELF!
BUT YOU CANNOT, FOR I CONTROL YOU, ARMOR AND SOUL!
OR AT LEAST I THOUGHT I DID, UNTIL YOU FAILED IN THE MISSION ON WHICH I DISPATCHED YOU!
BUT WHAT MADE YOU BRING ME THE HUMANITY OF ROM? I THINK I KNOW--
--AND A PLAN BEGINS TO FORM IN MY MIND BY WHICH, USING THIS FROZEN HUMANITY, I CAN GIVE YOU LIFE IN EXCHANGE FOR THAT WHICH YOU LOST...
--AND YOU CAN GIVE MASTERY OVER GALADOR TO ME--MENTUS!
TWO HUNDRED YEARS LATER, ROM--SPACE-KNIGHT--WILL DISCOVER WHETHER MEN-TUS'S PLAN SUCCEEDED OR FAILED! BE HERE FOR ROM #25!
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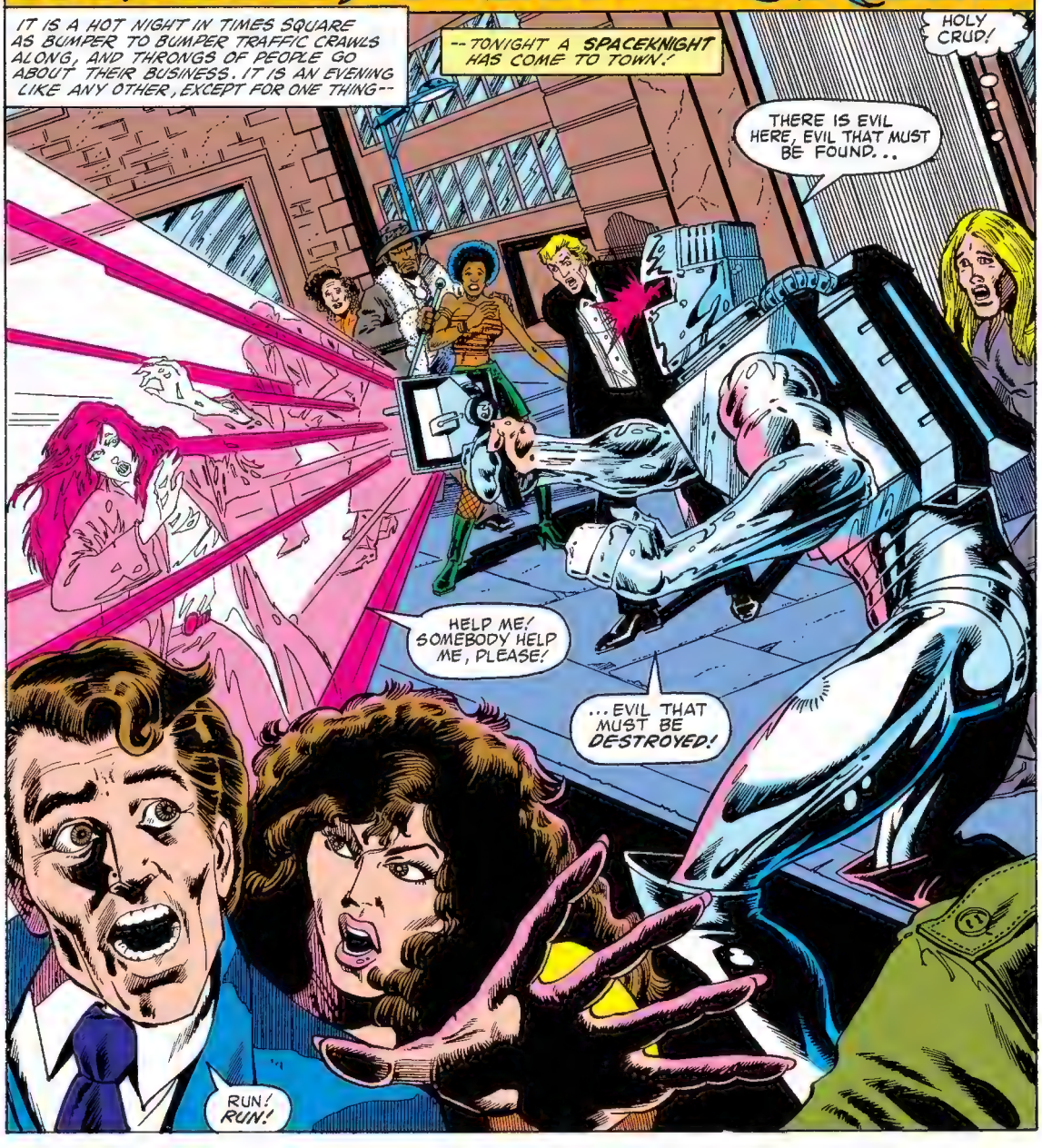
POWER MAN AND IRON FIST
TM
SPACEKNIGHT ON A RAMPAGE... ENTER--
ROM!

LUKE CAGE: a child of the streets. . . *DANIEL RAND*: a son of the mystic city of *K'un-Lun*. . . Two men from different worlds—both reborn with *strength* and *power beyond belief*! And together, no one can stop them!

Stan Lee PRESENTS: POWER MAN™ AND IRON FIST®

MARY JO DUFFY WRITER / GREG LA ROCQUE PENCILER / RICARDO VILLAMONTE INKER / JANICE CHIANG LETTERER / CHRISTIE SCHEELE COLORIST / DENNIS O'NEIL EDITOR / JIM SHOOTER LORD MAYOR

WRAITH, COLOR OR CREED


IT IS A HOT NIGHT IN TIMES SQUARE AS BUMPER TO BUMPER TRAFFIC CRAWLS ALONG, AND THRONGS OF PEOPLE GO ABOUT THEIR BUSINESS. IT IS AN EVENING LIKE ANY OTHER, EXCEPT FOR ONE THING--
--TONIGHT A SPACEKNIGHT HAS COME TO TOWN!
HOLY CRUD!
THERE IS EVIL HERE, EVIL THAT MUST BE FOUND...
HELP ME! SOMEBODY HELP ME, PLEASE!
...EVIL THAT MUST BE DESTROYED!
RUN! RUN!

IGNORING THE FUROR AROUND IT, THE SILVER CREATURE PLAYS THE BEAM OF ITS STRANGE DEVICE ACROSS THE TERRIFIED THRONG.
NO! NO!
POLLY, HONEY, THIS IS IT! WE GONNA... WE GONNA...
WE... WE AIN'T... WE AIN'T DEAD! HE TURNED HIS RAY GUN ON US, AN' I DIDN'T EVEN FEEL A THING!
THIS IS JIM HANSEN, COMING TO YOU LIVE FROM TIMES SQUARE, WHERE THE GIANT ROBOT LANDED, ONLY MINUTES AGO.
SO FAR, THE CREATURE HAS TAKEN NO OVERTLY HOSTILE ACTION, BUT, AFTER MAKING SOME CRYPTIC REMARKS ABOUT EVIL, TURNED A STRANGE BEAM OF LIGHT UPON THE CROWD.
WEEOOOO WEEOOOO WEOOOO
AND NOW, LADIES AND GENTLEMEN, THE POLICE HAVE ARRIVED ON THE SCENE, AND...
... WAIT A MINUTE! SOMETHING HAS GOT THE CREATURE VERY INTERESTED.
NYPD

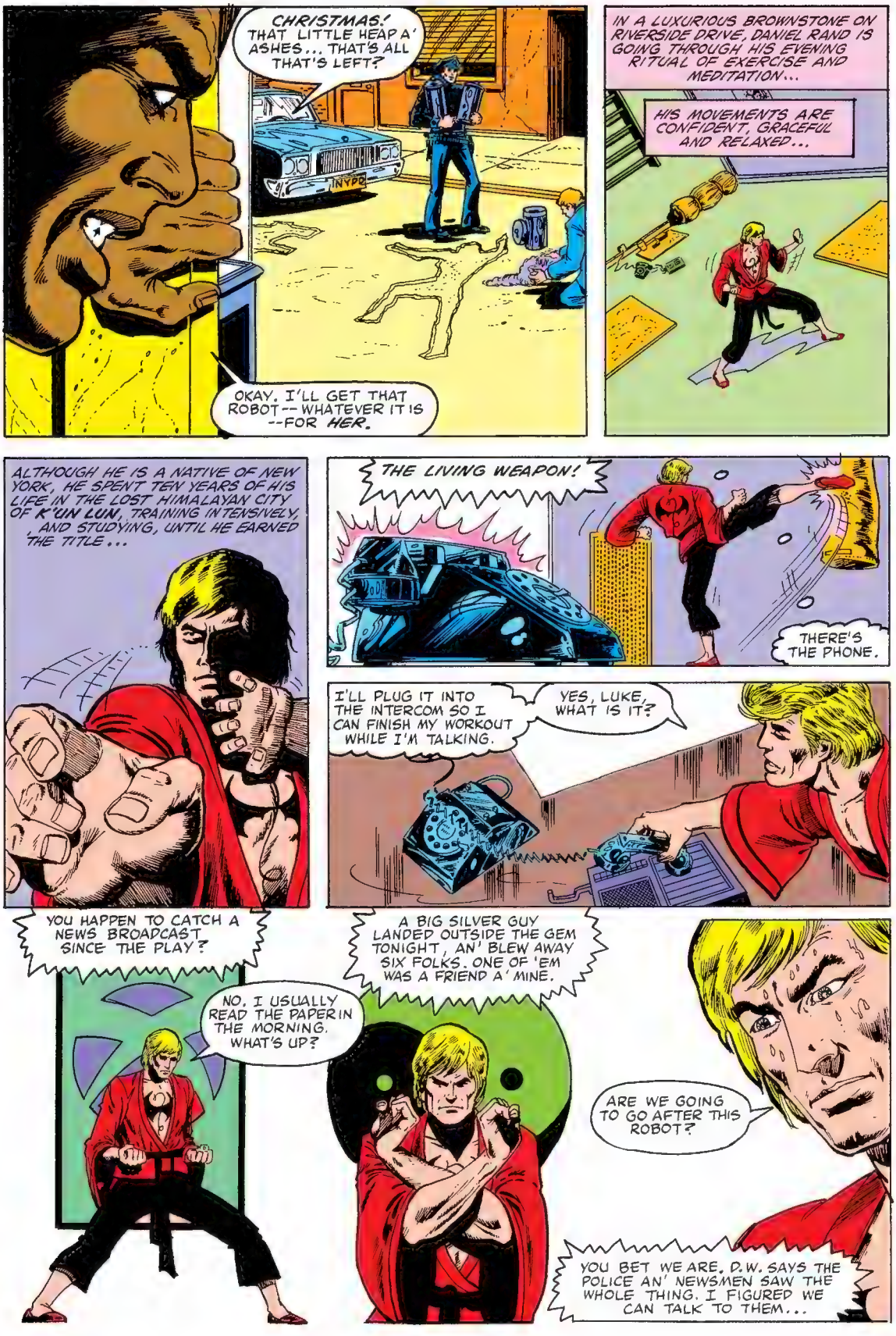
IT'S... IT'S UNBELIEVABLE! THE RAYGUN IS VANISHING FROM THE ROBOT'S HAND AS THOUGH IT WAS NEVER THERE.
I HAVE FOUND WHAT I SOUGHT. IT IS TIME TO ACT. I WILL NEVER REST WHILE MY ENEMIES GO FREE.
NOW ANOTHER WEAPON IS APPEARING IN THE CREATURE'S HAND... HE'S POINTING IT AT THE CROWD.
SO SWEARS ROM.
AGHK!
AAA'I'EEE!
POLLY!

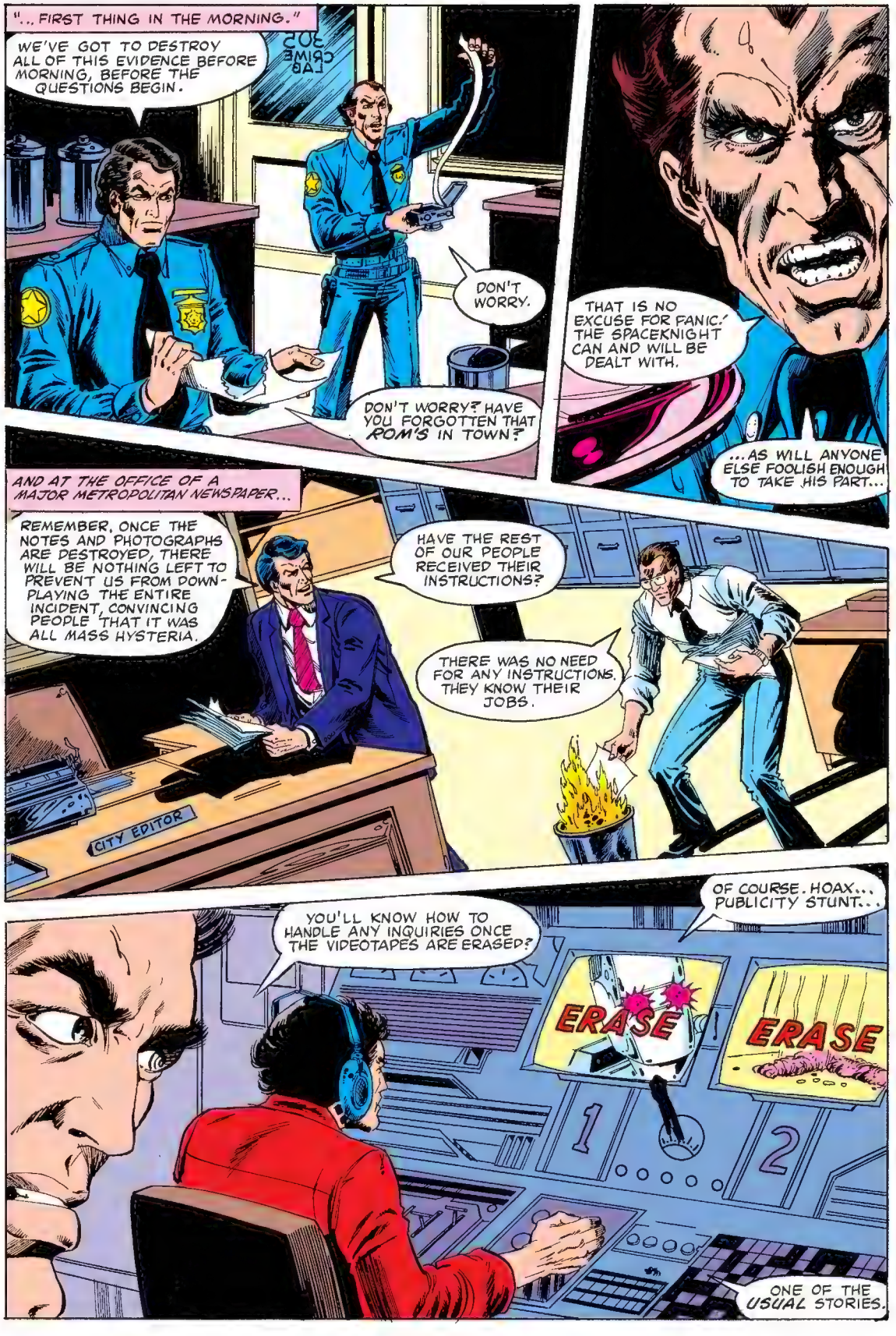
AFTER THE FIRST SHOCK OF RELIEF THAT HE HAS BEEN SPARED, FILM STUDENT D.W. GRIFFITH REALIZES THAT...
I DON'T GET IT! THE ROBOT COULD HAVE BLASTED ALL OF US--HE KILLED THE GUY NEXT TO ME--
--BUT HE ONLY SEEMED TO BE AFTER SPECIFIC PEOPLE! I WONDER WHAT IT ALL MEANS!
MY FOES HAVE BEEN ELIMINATED.
ALL RIGHT, HOLD IT RIGHT THERE. YOU'RE UNDER ARREST.
MAKE ONE MOVE AND I'LL OPEN FIRE.
HALT! ALL RIGHT. I WARNED YOU...
MY QUARREL, HUMAN IS NOT WITH YOU.
PING
ZING
TING
MY WORK HERE IS DONE.
NOW I MUST FIND THE ONES WHO CALL THEMSELVES THE FANTASTIC FOUR.
POLLY... HE KILLED POLLY ... ONE A' MY SWEETIES. THERE AIN'T EVEN ENOUGH A' HER LEFT TA BURY.
WHAT AM I GONNA DO?
"YOU MUST PUT YOUR GRIEF BEHIND YOU AND START AGAIN...

YOU HAVE SUFFERED--ALL HUMANITY HAS SUFFERED--AT THE HANDS OF THESE METAL MONSTERS, BUT THEY HAVE BEEN ROUTED! WE HAVE TRIUMPHED! NOW, IT IS THE TIME TO BURY OUR DEAD AND REBUILD OUR WORLD!
FOR IT IS ONLY THROUGH ADVERSITY THAT THE HUMAN RACE GROWS AND PROGRESSES, AND SHOWS THE TRUE NOBILITY THAT MOTIVATES IT.
AND IF THE ENEMY RETURNS AGAIN, THEY WILL FIND US READY!
INCLUDING LUKE "POWER MAN" CAGE AND HIS LADY, MODEL HARMONY YOUNG, CAGE'S PARTNER, DANNY RAND, A.K.A IRON FIST, AND HIS DATE, PRIVATE INVESTIGATOR, MISTY KNIGHT...
"THE DAY OF THE DEADLOX" STARRING BOB DIAMOND IS ONE OF THE HITS OF THE CURRENT BROADWAY SEASON. TONIGHT, DIAMOND IS WORKING PARTICULARLY HARD AT HIS PERFORMANCE, BECAUSE HE HAS SOME SPECIAL GUESTS IN THE AUDIENCE...
...AND MISTY'S RATHER STAR-STRUCK PARTNER, COLLEEN WING.
THE PLAY WAS GOOD. BOB WAS WONDERFUL!
HE HASN'T GIVEN A PERFORMANCE LIKE THAT SINCE HE WON HIS SECOND OSCAR!
DON'T LOOK NOW, COL, BUT HE SEEMS TO BE DIRECTING HIS CURTAIN CALLS TO THIS PART OF THE THEATRE. RIGHT AT YOU, TO BE PRECISE.
ULP.
OOH, HE'S JUST DREAMY.
I WISH HE'D LOOK AT ME LIKE THAT!

SOON, BACKSTAGE...
COME ON, HARMONY. I'LL SEE YOU HOME. THANKS FOR THE TICKETS, DIAMOND.
WHAT ABOUT, YOU COLLEEN? ARE YOU DOING ANYTHING RIGHT NOW, OR COULD I TAKE YOU FOR COFFEE?
GOOD NIGHT, LUKE.
I DON'T KNOW, BOB I...
COME ON, WHAT ELSE COULD YOU HAVE PLANNED? LUKE IS WITH HARMONY, AND DANNY'S WITH MISTY. WHAT IS THERE TO BE AFRAID OF?
I DON'T BITE--
--ON THE FIRST DATE.
LATER, AT COLLEEN'S APARTMENT...
"LOVE FROM SCOTT," HUH? IS THAT WHY YOU'VE BEEN KEEPING ME AT ARM'S LENGTH? BECAUSE YOU ALREADY HAVE A BOYFRIEND?
THERE'S MORE TO IT THAN THAT. YOU SEE...
EVERY TIME I CARED FOR SOMEONE, LET MYSELF CARE, SOMETHING TERRIBLE HAS HAPPENED. ALL MY LIFE... MY MOTHER DIED, MY GRANDFATHER... MY FATHER ALMOST LOST HIS MIND, MISTY HAD HER ARM BLOWN OFF IN AN EXPLOSION AND HAD TO GET A FALSE ONE...
I TRIED WITH SCOTT, I REALLY TRIED. I FOLLOWED MY HEART, AND THE MINUTE HIS OLD GIRLFRIEND CROOKED HER LITTLE FINGER, HE DUMPED ME. IT HURT. A LOT.
I'M NOT GIVING ANYONE A CHANCE TO MAKE ME FEEL THAT WAY AGAIN.
COLLEEN, I UNDERSTAND HOW YOU FEEL, BUT THAT'S PART OF LIFE... CARING FOR PEOPLE IS ALWAYS A RISK... BUT I KNOW HOW I FEEL ABOUT YOU, AND I THINK MAYBE YOU FEEL THE SAME...
I CAN'T OFFER YOU ANY GUARANTEES...
BUT WON'T YOU TAKE A CHANCE?
OH, BOB...

WHILE ON FORTY-SECOND STREET...
LOOKS LIKE THERE WAS SOME EXCITEMENT HERE THIS EVENIN'. WONDER WHAT HAPPENED.
IF IT'S GOT ANYTHING T'DO WITH ME OR ANY A' MY FRIENDS, I'LL FIND OUT SOON ENOUGH.
WEARILY, POWER MAN HEADS TOWARDS HOME--
JOHN WAYNE FESTIVAL
--A FOURTH-FLOOR WALK-UP ABOVE THE PROJECTION BOOTH OF THE GEM THEATRE.
EVENIN', D.W. YOU'RE UP LATE. WHAT'S SOLACE DOING HERE?
THERE WAS TROUBLE TONIGHT, CAGE.
SOMETHING PRETTY INCREDIBLE HAPPENED.
WASN'T NO "TROUBLE" WE HAD HERE, LUCAS, IT WAS MURDER!
YOU CALL YOURSELF A "HERO FOR HIRE," DON'T YOU, YOU AN' THAT WHITE BOY YOU WORK WITH, THAT IRON FIST? WELL, I'M GONNA HIRE YOU...
T'GET ME SOME REVENGE!
AGAINST THAT ... THAT...
A ROBOT, CAGE. A BIG, SILVER ROBOT. IT LANDED IN THE MIDDLE OF TOWN, PULLED OUT A RAYGUN, AND KILLED SIX PEOPLE. THEN IT FLEW OFF.
THE POLICE COULDN'T STOP IT.
MIKE '81
PHILBERT LOVES TATA
IT KILLED POLLY... MY POLLY...
POLLY'S...DEAD?
I'M WILLIN' T'PAY YOU, LUCAS. IF THIS AIN'T ENOUGH, I CAN GET MORE MONEY.
TAKE A LOOK OUT THE DOOR AN' SEE WHAT HAPPENED!


CHRISTMAS! THAT LITTLE HEAP A' ASHES... THAT'S ALL THAT'S LEFT?
OKAY. I'LL GET THAT ROBOT--WHATEVER IT IS --FOR HER.
IN A LUXURIOUS BROWNSTONE ON RIVERSIDE DRIVE, DANIEL RAND IS GOING THROUGH HIS EVENING RITUAL OF EXERCISE AND MEDITATION...
HIS MOVEMENTS ARE CONFIDENT, GRACEFUL AND RELAXED...
ALTHOUGH HE IS A NATIVE OF NEW YORK, HE SPENT TEN YEARS OF HIS LIFE IN THE LOST HIMALAYAN CITY OF K'UN LUN, TRAINING INTENSIVELY, AND STUDYING, UNTIL HE EARNED THE TITLE...
THE LIVING WEAPON!
THERE'S THE PHONE.
I'LL PLUG IT INTO THE INTERCOM SO I CAN FINISH MY WORKOUT WHILE I'M TALKING.
YES, LUKE, WHAT IS IT?
YOU HAPPEN TO CATCH A NEWS BROADCAST SINCE THE PLAY?
NO, I USUALLY READ THE PAPER IN THE MORNING. WHAT'S UP?
A BIG SILVER GUY LANDED OUTSIDE THE GEM TONIGHT, AN' BLEW AWAY SIX FOLKS. ONE OF 'EM WAS A FRIEND A' MINE.
ARE WE GOING TO GO AFTER THIS ROBOT?
YOU BET WE ARE. D.W. SAYS THE POLICE AN' NEWSMEN SAW THE WHOLE THING. I FIGURED WE CAN TALK TO THEM...


"...FIRST THING IN THE MORNING."
WE'VE GOT TO DESTROY ALL OF THIS EVIDENCE BEFORE MORNING, BEFORE THE QUESTIONS BEGIN.
305 CRIME LAB
DON'T WORRY.
DON'T WORRY? HAVE YOU FORGOTTEN THAT ROM'S IN TOWN?
THAT IS NO EXCUSE FOR PANIC.' THE SPACEKNIGHT CAN AND WILL BE DEALT WITH.
...AS WILL ANYONE ELSE FOOLISH ENOUGH TO TAKE HIS PART...
AND AT THE OFFICE OF A MAJOR METROPOLITAN NEWSPAPER...
REMEMBER, ONCE THE NOTES AND PHOTOGRAPHS ARE DESTROYED, THERE WILL BE NOTHING LEFT TO PREVENT US FROM DOWN-PLAYING THE ENTIRE INCIDENT, CONVINCING PEOPLE THAT IT WAS ALL MASS HYSTERIA.
HAVE THE REST OF OUR PEOPLE RECEIVED THEIR INSTRUCTIONS?
THERE WAS NO NEED FOR ANY INSTRUCTIONS. THEY KNOW THEIR JOBS.
CITY EDITOR
YOU'LL KNOW HOW TO HANDLE ANY INQUIRIES ONCE THE VIDEOTAPES ARE ERASED?
OF COURSE. HOAX... PUBLICITY STUNT...
ERASE
ERASE
1
2
ONE OF THE USUAL STORIES.

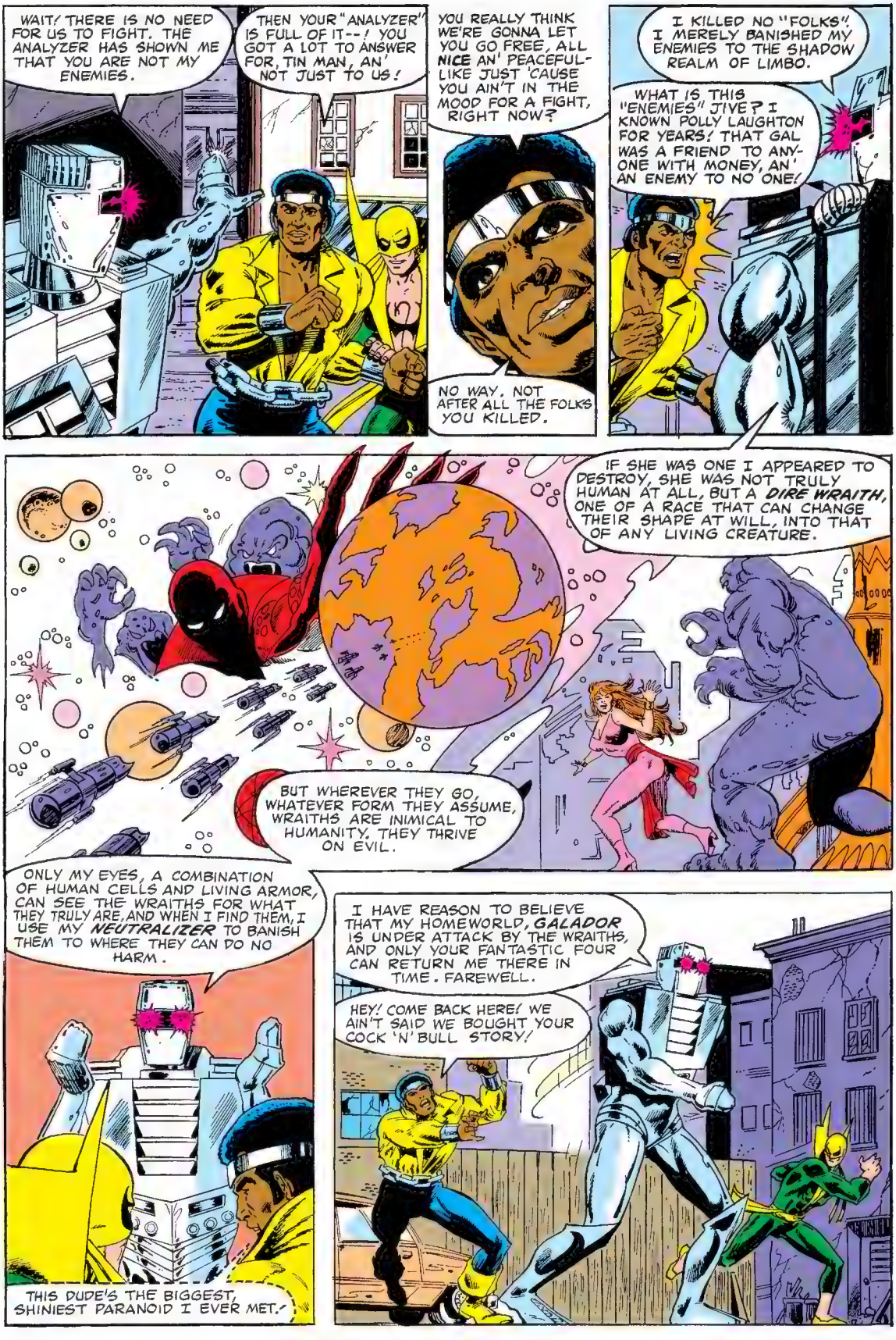
THE NEXT MORNING AT POLICE HEADQUARTERS...
WHAT ARE YOU JIVIN' US WITH?
ARE YOU CERTAIN, LIEUTENANT SCARFE?
NO CHARGES, NO EVIDENCE, NO BODIES.
POSITIVE. I HEARD THE SAME RUMORS YOU DID ABOUT A GIANT ALIEN ROBOT KILLING PEOPLE, BUT THERE HASN'T BEEN ANY SUBSTANTIATION.
BULL! I SAW WHAT WAS LEFT A' ONE A' THEM BODIES. ONE'A SOLACE'S GIRLS WAS KILLED AN' HE AN' D.W. SAW THE MACHINE THAT DID IT!
WHAT YOU GOT HERE'S A COVER-UP!
OH, HI, NEIL.
GOOD MORNING, LIEUTENANT. I COULDN'T HELP OVERHEARING YOUR ARGUMENT. MAYBE I COULD HELP YOU A LITTLE WITH YOUR PROBLEM.
LT. SCARFE
POWER MAN, HAVE YOU CONSIDERED WHO YOUR SOURCES WERE? THAT FANCY-MAN IS PROBABLY JUST LOOKING FOR A WAY TO HIDE THAT ONE OF HIS GIRLS RAN OUT ON HIM.
AND AS FOR THAT LONG-HAIRED KID..
...MAYBE IF HE STOPPED SMOKING WEIRD THINGS, HE'D STOP HAVING NIGHTMARES.
DIRTY, LOUSY, SLIMY, STINKIN'--
CRUD!
STOP IT, LUKE!
I KNOW YOU'RE UPSET, BUT DESTROYING THINGS ISN'T GOING TO HELP.
DID YOU SEE WHAT HE--?!
STOP. FORGET IT. IF YOU CHARGE HIM WITH A CRIME, THERE WILL BE AN INQUIRY. AN OFFICIAL INQUIRY!
DON'T SEEM TOO UPSET ABOUT LOSIN' ONE'A THEIR POLICE CARS, DO THEY?
COME ON, LET'S GET OUTTA HERE.

AFTER HOURS OF FRUITLESS SEARCHING, AND ASKING QUESTIONS, POWER MAN AND IRON FIST RETURN TO THEIR OFFICES -- HEROES FOR HIRE, ON PARK AVENUE.
LUKE... IRON FIST-- THANK GOODNESS YOU'VE COME BACK. I'VE BEEN TRYING TO REACH YOU.
WHY, JENNIE?
THIS VIDEOTAPE WAS SENT HERE THIS MORNING ... IT RELATES TO THIS CASE YOU'RE ON...
...AND IT'S FROM REED RICHARDS OF THE FANTASTIC FOUR-- MISTER FANTASTIC HIMSELF!
LUKE, YOU'VE WORKED FOR US IN THE PAST, AND WE'RE COUNTING ON YOU AGAIN.
WE'VE HEARD YOU'RE INVESTIGATING THE CREATURE THAT RAMPAGED THROUGH TIMES SQUARE LAST NIGHT.
ROM, AS HE CALLS HIMSELF IS A MEMBER OF A HOSTILE ALIEN RACE CALLED SPACE-KNIGHTS MEAN TO ATTACK US, SOON.
MY PARTNERS AND I ARE GOING TO FACE THEM BEFORE THAT HAPPENS. IN THE MEANTIME, WE'RE COUNTING ON YOU TO KEEP THIS ROM AWAY FROM OUR HEADQUARTERS.
GOOD LUCK, LUKE.
SO, NOW WE GOT TWO CLIENTS, BOTH PAYIN' US TO STOP THIS ROM, AIN'T REAL POPULAR, IS HE?
JENNIE, WERE YOU ABLE TO LEARN ANYTHING ABOUT HIM?
YES... AND NO. FACTS ABOUT HIM ARE ELUSIVE.

AS NEAR AS I CAN TELL, ROM HAS GOTTEN A FAIR AMOUNT OF PUBLICITY, MOST OF IT SENSATIONAL, BUT USUALLY AFTER A DAY OR TWO, THE FUROR OF EACH INCIDENT HAS DIED DOWN...
...AND WITNESSES HAVE EITHER DISAPPEARED OR MADE SHAME-FACED CONFESSIONS ABOUT PUBLICITY STUNTS AND MASS HYSTERIA.
ROM FIRST APPEARED IN CLAIRTON, WEST VIRGINIA, ONE NIGHT SEVERAL MONTHS AGO, AND TO THE INITIAL ACCOUNTS, TERRIFIED THE LOCAL RESIDENTS, KILLING A NUMBER OF THEM.
AFTER A BATTLE WITH THE HERO CALLED JACK OF HEARTS, IN WASHINGTON, D.C. ROM WAS REPORTED DESTROYED. HE LATER REAPPEARED, HOWEVER. OR AT LEAST NEW RUMORS STARTED.
EVERYTHING I'VE LEARNED POINTS TO EITHER AN ENORMOUS CONSPIRACY, OR A VERY DEADLY ENEMY. OR BOTH.
THANKS.
YOU KNOW, THE SIMPLEST THING FOR YOU TO DO WOULD BE TO GO TO THE F.F.'S HEADQUARTERS AND WAIT FOR THIS ROM TO FIND YOU THERE. IT WOULD MAKE IT EASY FOR ME TO CONTACT YOU, TOO.
WE COULD DO THAT. BUT ROM COULD DO A LOT OF DAMAGE BEFORE HE GETS TO THE F.F.'S HEADQUARTERS IF THAT REALLY IS WHERE HE'S HEADING.
FIST'S RIGHT, JENNIE: OUR PLACE NOW IS ON THE STREETS. THAT'S WHERE THE WAR IS.
WE'LL BE IN TOUCH.

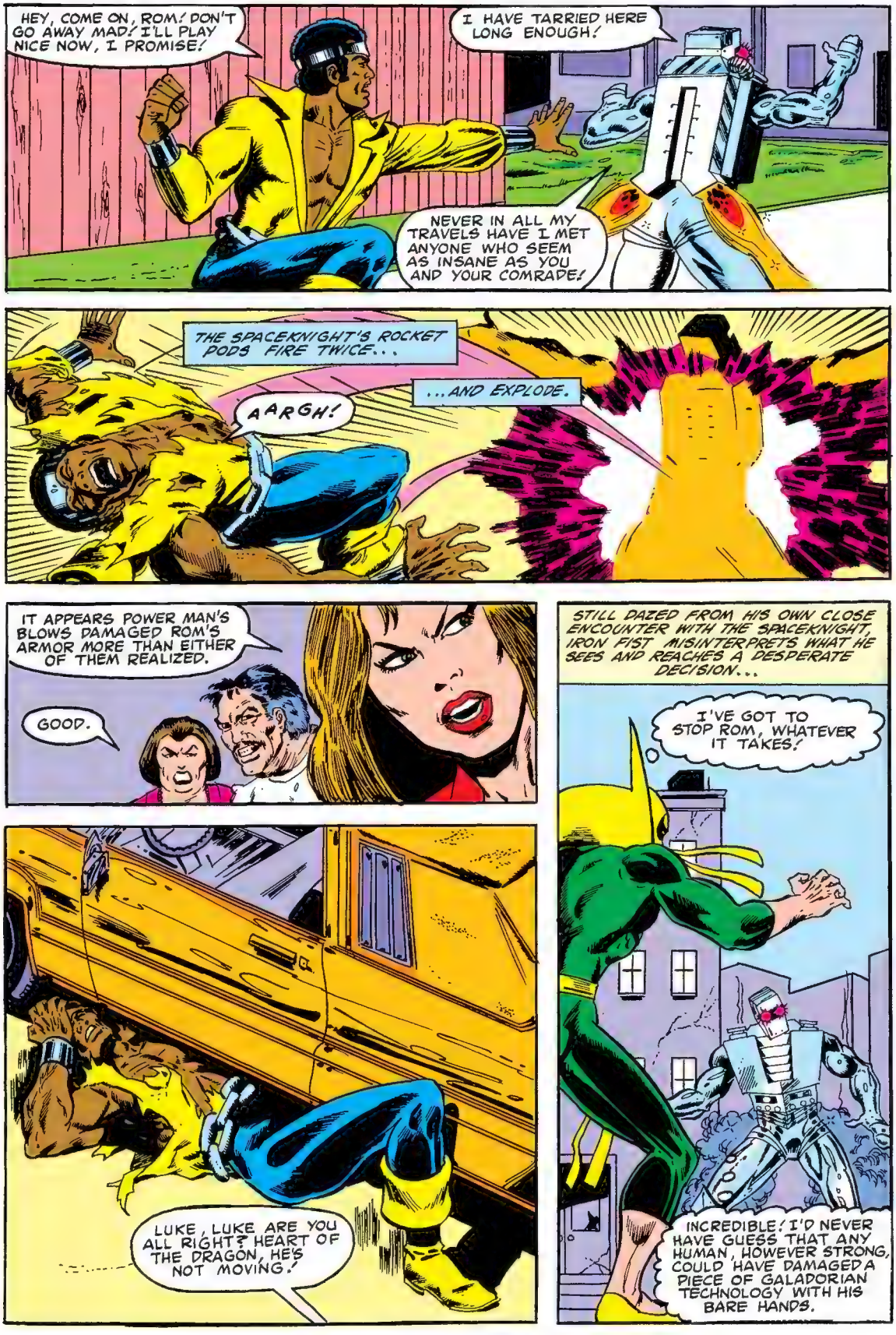
LATER, IN ONE OF NEW YORK'S HISPANIC NEIGHBORHOOD'S...
PERHAPS HERE I WILL FIND SOMEONE WHO CAN HELP ME IN MY QUEST, BUT FIRST I MUST LEARN IF THERE ARE ENEMIES ABOUT.
¡POR DIOS!
¡SALVA ME!
CHILD, MY ENERGY ANALYZER HAS REVEALED THAT YOU ARE TRULY WHAT YOU APPEAR TO BE! I COME AS AN ALLY OF HUMANITY! WILL YOU HELP ME?
NO COMPRENDO ... NO, HABLO INGLÉS... POR FAVOR...
YOU DO NOT SPEAK ANY OF THE TONGUES I HAVE ENCOUNTERED SINCE I LANDED ON YOUR WORLD. THUS, YOU CANNOT HELP ME.
¿QUÉ VA A HACER, CONMIGO?
¿QUÉ ES...
<...THAT?>
<WHAT IS THAT STRANGE DEVICE?>
<IT IS THE TRANSLATOR AS WE CONVERSE, IT IS STORING YOUR LANGUAGE--SPANISH--INTO THE MEMORY CIRCUITS OF MY ARMOR.>
<BUT WHY? WHAT DO YOU WANT WITH MY LANGUAGE? WHAT DO YOU WANT WITH ME?>
<INFORMATION. I SEEK THOSE YOUR PEOPLE CALL THE FANTASTIC FOUR. YOU WILL TELL ME WHERE I CAN FIND THEM.>
<THE FANTASTIC FOUR? WHY DO YOU WANT THEM? ARE YOU GOING TO KILL THEM?>

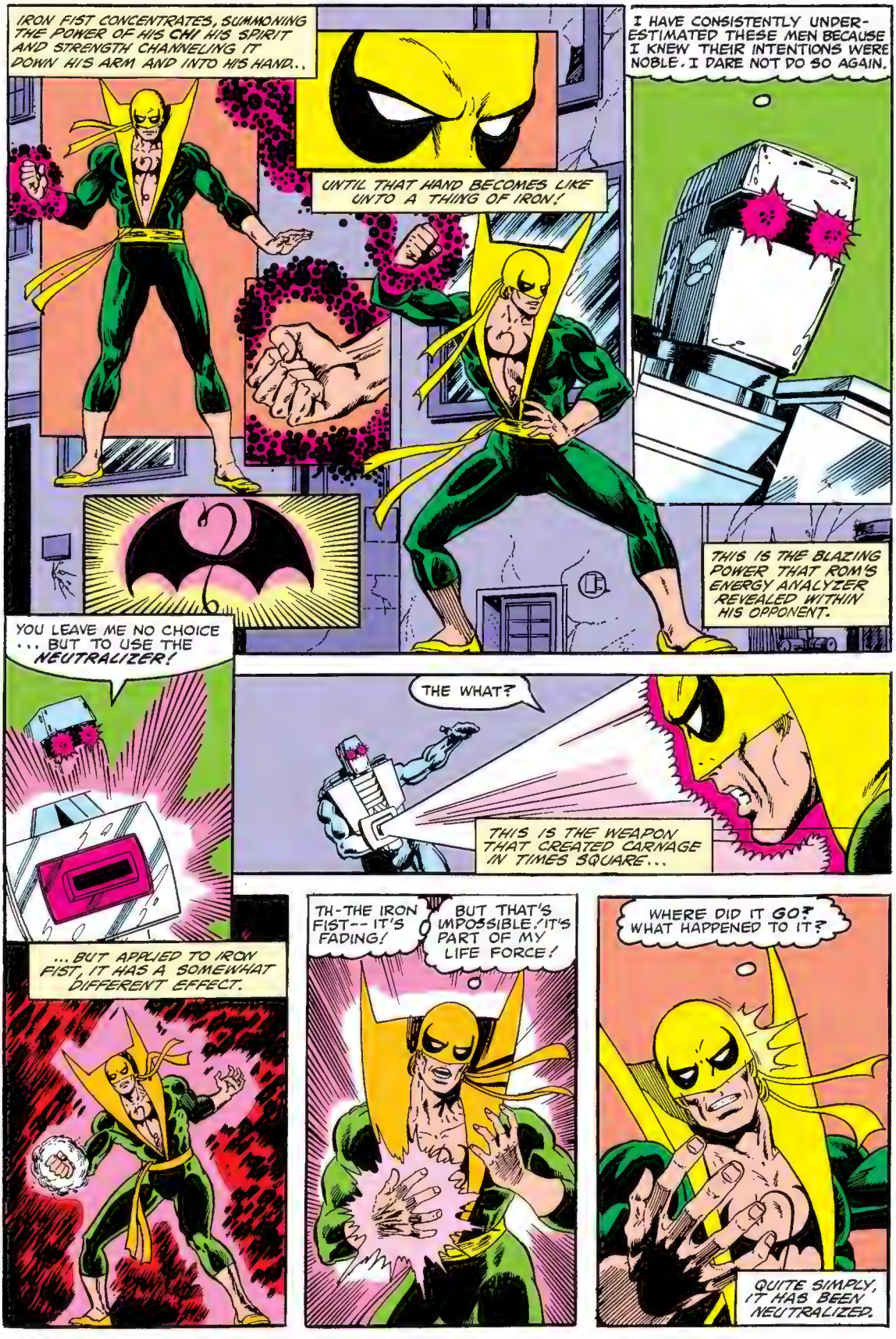
HA!
WHAT?
DON'T WORRY, SON. YOU'RE SAFE NOW.
WISH I KNEW WHAT YOU TWO WERE SAYING BUT ALL THAT TALK ABOUT "LOS CUATRO FANTASTICOS" SOUNDED PRETTY DEFINITE.
¿QUÉ?
THAT YOUTH STRUCK ME WITH FORCE SUCH AS I'VE NEVER ENCOUNTERED IN A HUMAN. I MUST TURN THE ENERGY ANALYZER UPON THESE NEWCOMERS AND LEARN THEIR TRUE NATURE.
LOOK OUT, LUKE!
AND TO ROM'S ELECTRONICALLY-ENHANCED VISION, THE ANALYZER DOES REVEAL THE TRUTH.
INCREDIBLE! THE BODY OF ONE IS SO POWERFUL, SO DENSE THAT EVEN THE RAYS OF THE ANALYZER CANNOT PENETRATE IT, AND THE OTHER ONE PULSES WITH STRANGE POWER...
...A FORCE THAT IS SOMEHOW CONCENTRATED IN THE BRAND ON HIS CHEST.
DIDN'T FEEL A THING. DID YOU, LUKE?
NO.
TOO BAD, MR. SPACEMAN. LOOKS LIKE YOUR FANCY TOY AIN'T GONNA WORK ON US. NOW WE GOT A SCORE T'SETTLE.


WAIT! THERE IS NO NEED FOR US TO FIGHT. THE ANALYZER HAS SHOWN ME THAT YOU ARE NOT MY ENEMIES.
THEN YOUR "ANALYZER" IS FULL OF IT--! YOU GOT A LOT TO ANSWER FOR, TIN MAN, AN' NOT JUST TO US!
YOU REALLY THINK WE'RE GONNA LET YOU GO FREE, ALL NICE AN' PEACEFUL-LIKE JUST 'CAUSE YOU AIN'T IN THE MOOD FOR A FIGHT, RIGHT NOW?
NO WAY. NOT AFTER ALL THE FOLKS YOU KILLED.
I KILLED NO "FOLKS". I MERELY BANISHED MY ENEMIES TO THE SHADOW REALM OF LIMBO.
WHAT IS THIS "ENEMIES" JIVE? I KNOWN POLLY LAUGHTON FOR YEARS! THAT GAL WAS A FRIEND TO ANY-ONE WITH MONEY, AN' AN ENEMY TO NO ONE!
IF SHE WAS ONE I APPEARED TO DESTROY, SHE WAS NOT TRULY HUMAN AT ALL, BUT A DIRE WRAITH, ONE OF A RACE THAT CAN CHANGE THEIR SHAPE AT WILL, INTO THAT OF ANY LIVING CREATURE.
BUT WHEREVER THEY GO, WHATEVER FORM THEY ASSUME, WRAITHS ARE INIMICAL TO HUMANITY, THEY THRIVE ON EVIL.
ONLY MY EYES, A COMBINATION OF HUMAN CELLS AND LIVING ARMOR, CAN SEE THE WRAITHS FOR WHAT THEY TRULY ARE. AND WHEN I FIND THEM, I USE MY NEUTRALIZER TO BANISH THEM TO WHERE THEY CAN DO NO HARM.
THIS DUDE'S THE BIGGEST, SHINIEST PARANOID I EVER MET.
I HAVE REASON TO BELIEVE THAT MY HOMEWORLD, GALADOR IS UNDER ATTACK BY THE WRAITHS, AND ONLY YOUR FANTASTIC FOUR CAN RETURN ME THERE IN TIME. FAREWELL.
HEY! COME BACK HERE! WE AIN'T SAID WE BOUGHT YOUR COCK 'N' BULL STORY!

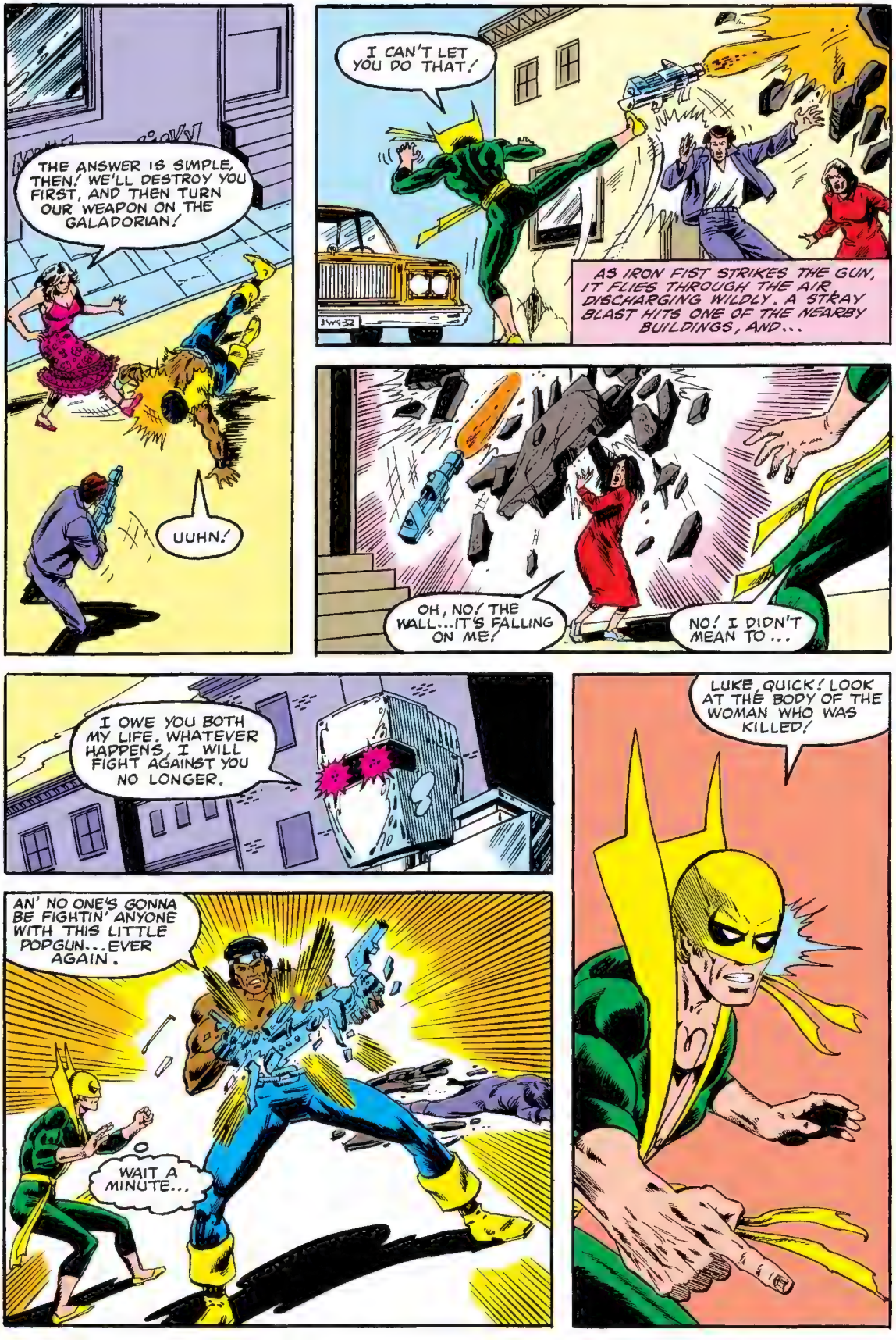
ROM WAIT! WE CAN'T LET YOU GO. THERE'S STILL SO MUCH YOU HAVEN'T EXPLAINED.
IF YOUR STORY ABOUT THE DIRE WRAITHS IS TRUE, THE AUTHORITIES OUGHT TO HEAR IT...
DO NOT SEEK TO HINDER ME, YOUTH. MY MISSION IS URGENT. IF YOU ATTEMPT TO DETAIN ME, I SHALL USE FORCE.
A THREAT OF FORCE IS HARDLY ENOUGH TO INTIMIDATE THE GREATEST WARRIOR OF K'UN LUN, BUT...
OONWW!
NOT THE BRIGHTEST THING I'VE EVER DONE. THIS IS LIKE HITTING A TANK.
I WARNED YOU, HUMAN...
I'LL HAVE TO TRY SOMETHING SUBTLER.
JIM + MITZIE
WHAT...?
FOR TWO HUNDRED YEARS, ROM HAS ROAMED THE SPACEWAYS, FIGHTING H/S WAR. TODAY, COURTESY OF IRON FIST, HE HAS H/S FIRST ENCOUNTER...
...WITH THE SCIENCE OF LEVERAGE.
GODS OF GALADOR!

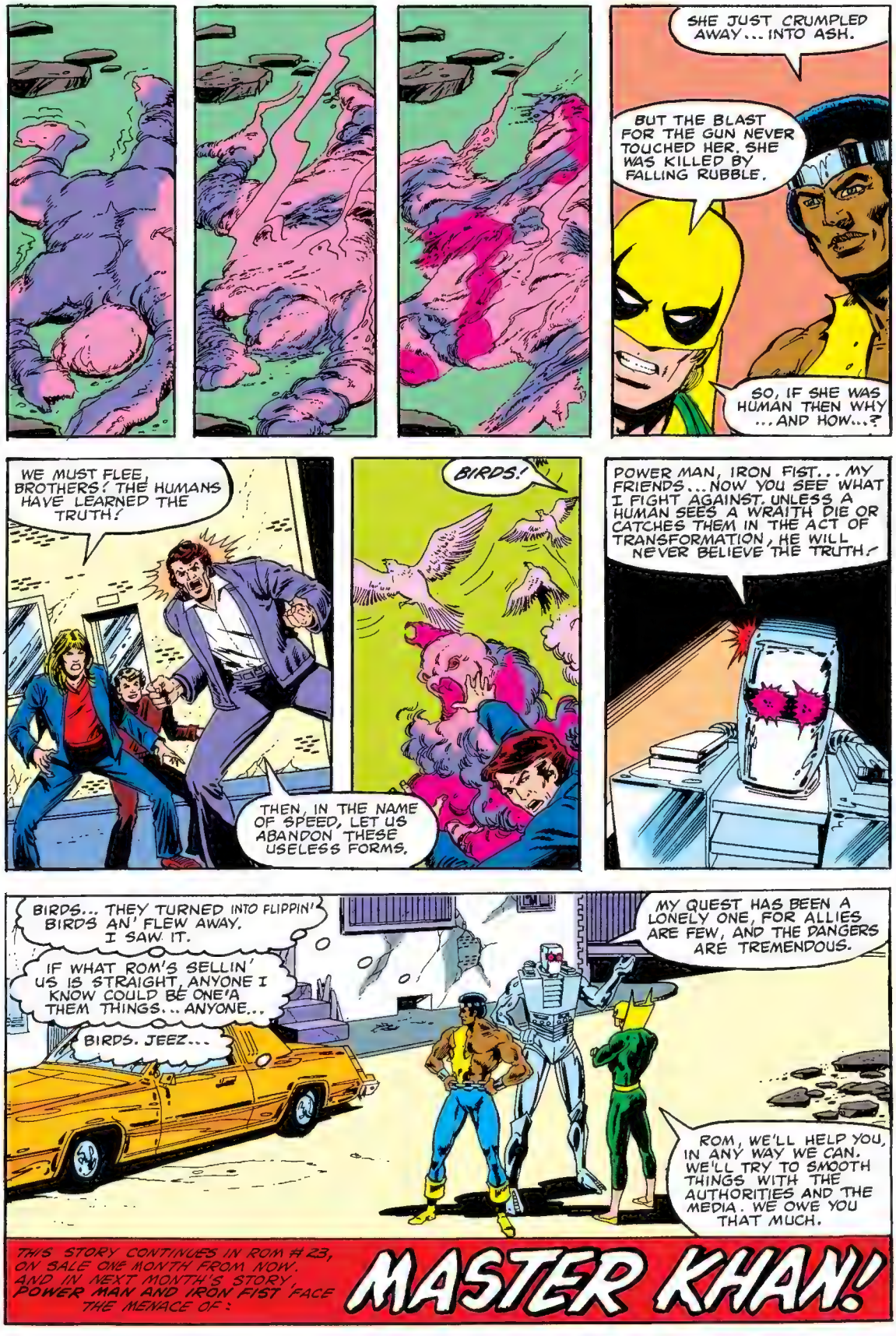
CAREFUL, FIST! HE'S DOWN, BUT FROM THE LOOK A' HIM, HE AIN'T OUT!
HE SOON WILL BE, ONE WAY OR ANOTHER!
OOF
HE IS NO STRONGER THAN THE REST OF HIS RACE, YET SOMEHOW HE MANAGED TO TOPPLE ME. I CANNOT LET HIM DO SO AGAIN.
I WARNED YOU!
AN' I'M WARNIN' YOU, TOO, TIN-SKIN! STOP PICKIN' ON MY FRIENDS!
POWER MAN MANAGES TO LAND SEVERAL SOLID BLOWS ON ROM'S ROCKET PODS, BEFORE...
ENOUGH! IF YOU SMITE ME AGAIN, I WILL KNOW YOU ARE MY ENEMY AND TREAT YOU AS ONE.
FAIR ENOUGH!
THAT'S WHAT I BEEN TRYING TO ARRANGE SINCE I GOT HERE!
PAF
HE HIT ME HARD ENOUGH TO TOSS ME TEN FEET, AN' HE WASN'T EVEN TRYIN'! BY RIGHTS, FIST SHOULD BE A HUNDRED-FIFTY POUNDS A' HAMBURGER RIGHT NOW... UNLESS ROM REALLY DON'T WANNA HURT US.

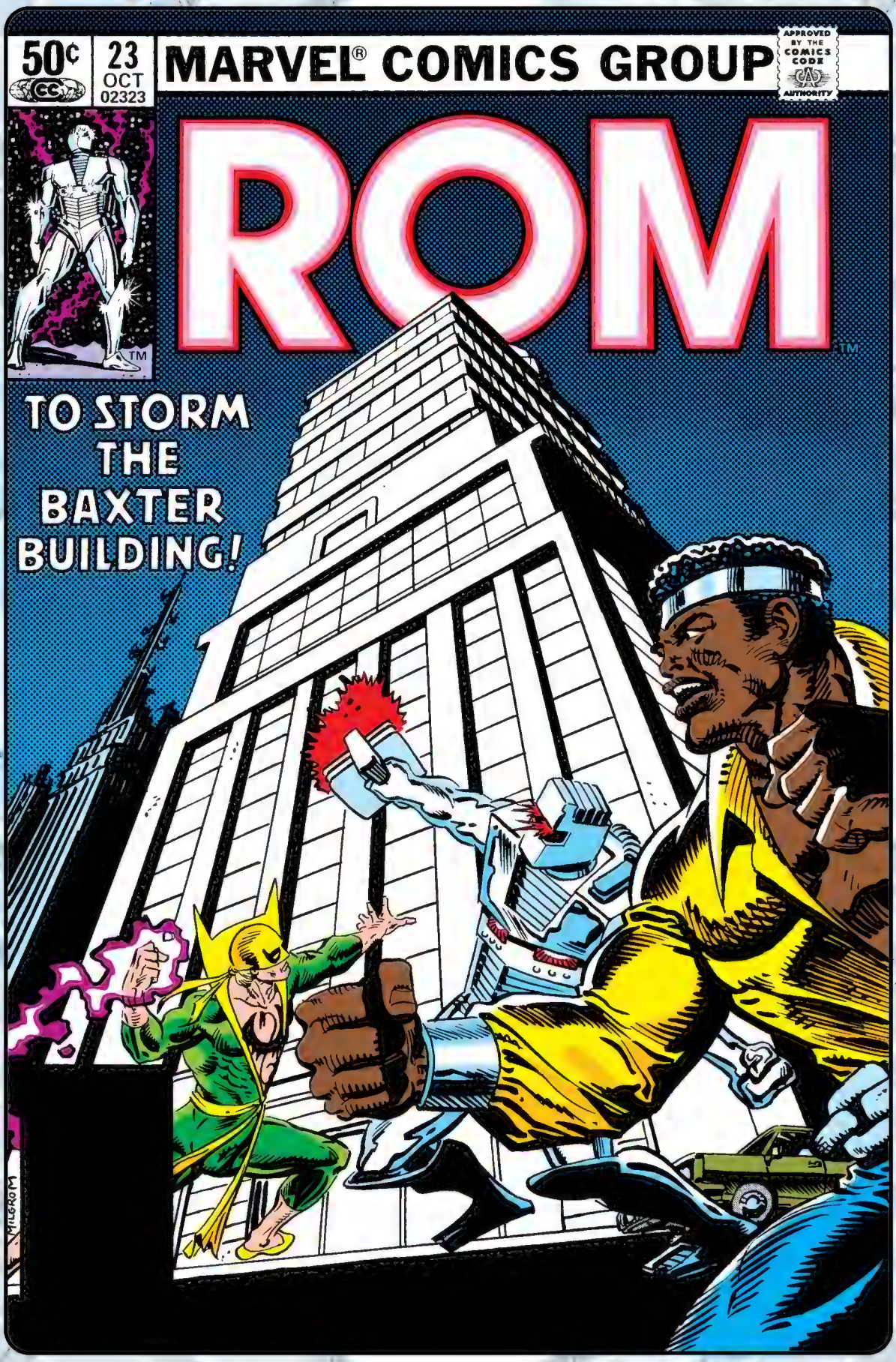

HEY, COME ON, ROM! DON'T GO AWAY MAD! I'LL PLAY NICE NOW, I PROMISE!
I HAVE TARRIED HERE LONG ENOUGH!
NEVER IN ALL MY TRAVELS HAVE I MET ANYONE WHO SEEM AS INSANE AS YOU AND YOUR COMRADE!
THE SPACEKNIGHT'S ROCKET PODS FIRE TWICE...
...AND EXPLODE.
AARGH!
IT APPEARS POWER MAN'S BLOWS DAMAGED ROM'S ARMOR MORE THAN EITHER OF THEM REALIZED.
GOOD.
STILL DAZED FROM HIS OWN CLOSE ENCOUNTER WITH THE SPACEKNIGHT, IRON FIST MISINTERPRETS WHAT HE SEES AND REACHES A DESPERATE DECISION...
I'VE GOT TO STOP ROM, WHATEVER IT TAKES!
LUKE, LUKE ARE YOU ALL RIGHT? HEART OF THE DRAGON, HE'S NOT MOVING!
INCREDIBLE! I'D NEVER HAVE GUESS THAT ANY HUMAN, HOWEVER STRONG, COULD HAVE DAMAGED A PIECE OF GALADORIAN TECHNOLOGY WITH HIS BARE HANDS.


IRON FIST CONCENTRATES, SUMMONING THE POWER OF HIS CHI HIS SPIRIT AND STRENGTH CHANNELING IT DOWN HIS ARM AND INTO HIS HAND..
UNTIL THAT HAND BECOMES LIKE UNTO A THING OF IRON!
I HAVE CONSISTENTLY UNDER-ESTIMATED THESE MEN BECAUSE I KNEW THEIR INTENTIONS WERE NOBLE. I DARE NOT DO SO AGAIN.
THIS IS THE BLAZING POWER THAT ROM'S ENERGY ANALYZER REVEALED WITHIN HIS OPPONENT.
YOU LEAVE ME NO CHOICE ... BUT TO USE THE NEUTRALIZER!
THE WHAT?
THIS IS THE WEAPON THAT CREATED CARNAGE IN TIMES SQUARE...
...BUT APPLIED TO IRON FIST, IT HAS A SOMEWHAT DIFFERENT EFFECT.
TH-THE IRON FIST-- IT'S FADING!
BUT THAT'S IMPOSSIBLE! IT'S PART OF MY LIFE FORCE!
WHERE DID IT GO? WHAT HAPPENED TO IT?
QUITE SIMPLY, IT HAS BEEN NEUTRALIZED.

UUHHNN! I AM NEVER GONNA HIT SOMEBODY WHO'S WEARIN' A ROCKET AGAIN!
HEY, WHAT IN...
LOOKS LIKE SOMEONE IN THE NEIGHBORHOOD BROUGHT UP REINFORCEMENTS, WHERE DID THEY GET THAT WEIRD-LOOKIN' GUN?
HOLD IT! DON'T FIRE THAT THING! IRON FIST IS IN THE WAY!
WHAT A PITY!
DO NOT FEAR, IRON FIST! MY ARMOR WILL SHIELD US BOTH!
ROM!!
HOW BAD IS IT?
WRAITH... WEAPON ...HAS THE POWER TO... KILL...
THEN THEY AIN'T GONNA GET A SECOND SHOT AT YOU! NOT IF I CAN HELP IT!
BOXING


THE ANSWER IS SIMPLE, THEN! WE'LL DESTROY YOU FIRST, AND THEN TURN OUR WEAPON ON THE GALADORIAN!
UUHN!
I CAN'T LET YOU DO THAT!
AS IRON FIST STRIKES THE GUN, IT FLIES THROUGH THE AIR DISCHARGING WILDLY. A STRAY BLAST HITS ONE OF THE NEARBY BUILDINGS, AND...
OH, NO! THE WALL...IT'S FALLING ON ME!
NO! I DIDN'T MEAN TO...
I OWE YOU BOTH MY LIFE. WHATEVER HAPPENS, I WILL FIGHT AGAINST YOU NO LONGER.
LUKE, QUICK! LOOK AT THE BODY OF THE WOMAN WHO WAS KILLED!
AN' NO ONE'S GONNA BE FIGHTIN' ANYONE WITH THIS LITTLE POPGUN...EVER AGAIN.
WAIT A MINUTE...


SHE JUST CRUMPLED AWAY... INTO ASH.
BUT THE BLAST FOR THE GUN NEVER TOUCHED HER. SHE WAS KILLED BY FALLING RUBBLE.
SO, IF SHE WAS HUMAN THEN WHY ...AND HOW...?
WE MUST FLEE, BROTHERS! THE HUMANS HAVE LEARNED THE TRUTH!
BIRDS!
THEN, IN THE NAME OF SPEED, LET US ABANDON THESE USELESS FORMS.
POWER MAN, IRON FIST... MY FRIENDS... NOW YOU SEE WHAT I FIGHT AGAINST. UNLESS A HUMAN SEES A WRAITH DIE OR CATCHES THEM IN THE ACT OF TRANSFORMATION, HE WILL NEVER BELIEVE THE TRUTH.
BIRDS... THEY TURNED INTO FLIPPIN' BIRDS AN' FLEW AWAY. I SAW IT.
IF WHAT ROM'S SELLIN' US IS STRAIGHT, ANYONE I KNOW COULD BE ONE'A THEM THINGS... ANYONE...
BIRDS. JEEZ...
MY QUEST HAS BEEN A LONELY ONE, FOR ALLIES ARE FEW, AND THE DANGERS ARE TREMENDOUS.
ROM, WE'LL HELP YOU, IN ANY WAY WE CAN. WE'LL TRY TO SMOOTH THINGS WITH THE AUTHORITIES AND THE MEDIA. WE OWE YOU THAT MUCH.
THIS STORY CONTINUES IN ROM # 23, ON SALE ONE MONTH FROM NOW. AND IN NEXT MONTH'S STORY, POWER MAN AND IRON FIST FACE THE MENACE OF:
MASTER KHAN!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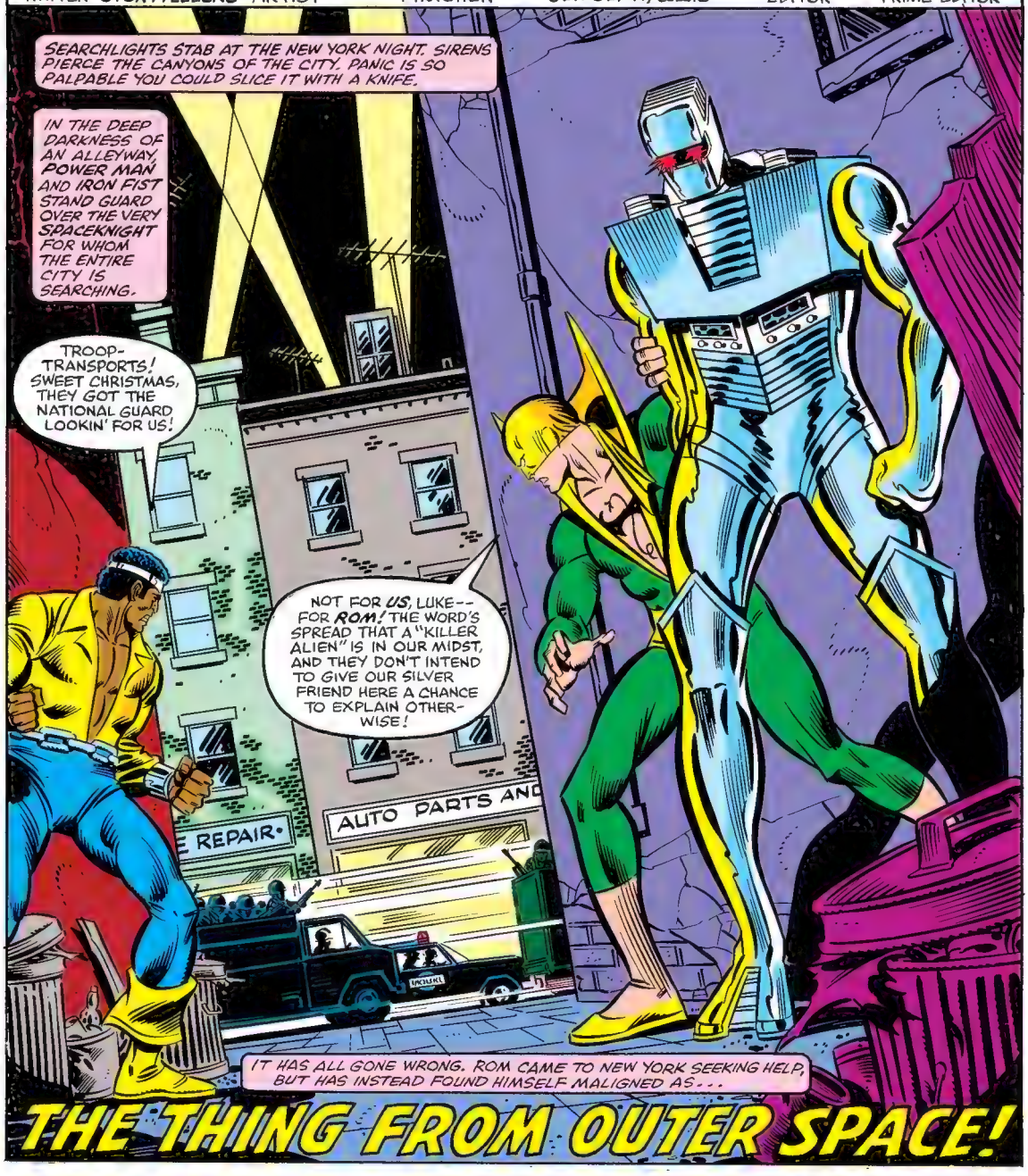
MARVEL® COMICS GROUP
APPROVED BY THE COMICS CODE AUTHORITY
ROM
TM
TO STORM THE BAXTER BUILDING!
MILGROM

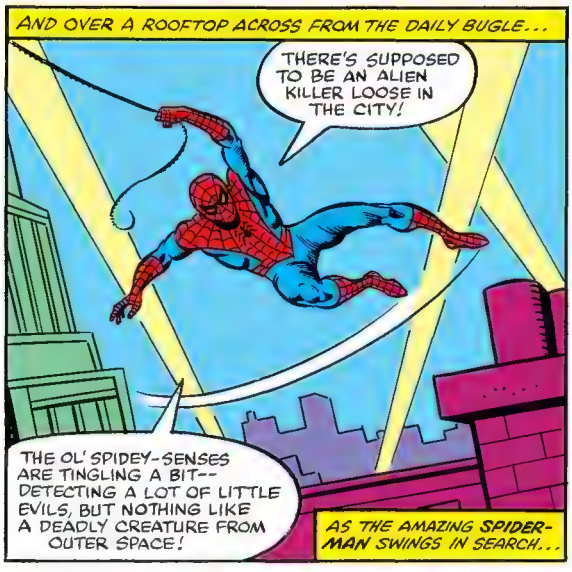
Two-hundred years ago, the evil Dire Wraiths threatened the peace-loving planet, Galador. In their homeworld's darkest hour, a thousand brave, young Galadorians sacrificed humanity itself to become Cyborg Warriors, a last desperate line of defense. Though hopelessly outnumbered, these Spaceknights triumphed, and pursued the remnants of the Wraith horde across the universe. Now, alone in the Enemy's mightiest stronghold, on a backward planet called Earth, one Galadorian Warrior faces his most awesome challenge.

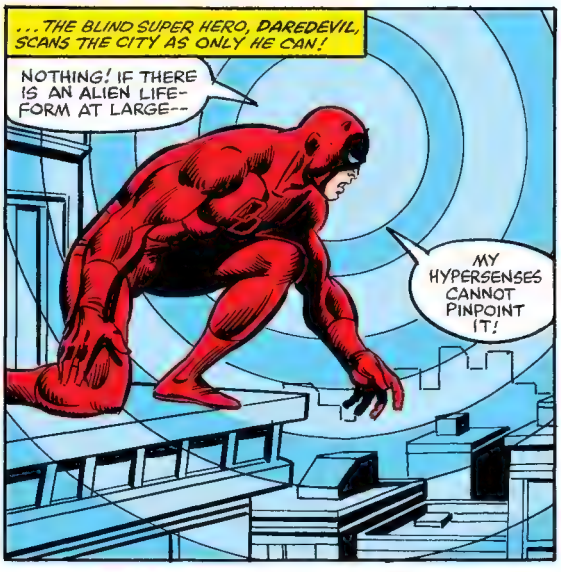
STAN LEE PRESENTS: THE GREATEST OF THE SPACEKNIGHTS--ROM!

BILL MANTLO & SAL BUSCEMA * JOE SINNOTT * ROSEN & ZALME, LETTERS * AL MILGROM * JIM SHOOTER
WRITER-STORYTELLERS-ARTIST FINISHER BEN SEAN, COLORS EDITOR PRIME EDITOR


SEARCHLIGHTS STAB AT THE NEW YORK NIGHT. SIRENS PIERCE THE CANYONS OF THE CITY. PANIC IS SO PALPABLE YOU COULD SLICE IT WITH A KNIFE.
IN THE DEEP DARKNESS OF AN ALLEYWAY, POWER MAN AND IRON FIST STAND GUARD OVER THE VERY SPACEKNIGHT FOR WHOM THE ENTIRE CITY IS SEARCHING.
TROOP-TRANSPORTS! SWEET CHRISTMAS, THEY GOT THE NATIONAL GUARD LOOKIN' FOR US!
NOT FOR US, LUKE--FOR ROM! THE WORD'S SPREAD THAT A "KILLER ALIEN" IS IN OUR MIDST, AND THEY DON'T INTEND TO GIVE OUR SILVER FRIEND HERE A CHANCE TO EXPLAIN OTHER-WISE!
AUTO PARTS AND
REPAIR
IT HAS ALL GONE WRONG. ROM CAME TO NEW YORK SEEKING HELP, BUT HAS INSTEAD FOUND HIMSELF MALIGNED AS...
THE THING FROM OUTER SPACE!

BEFORE EXPLAINING HOW ROM AND HIS EARTHLING ALLIES CAME TO THEIR PERILOUS PASS, LET US OBSERVE WITH THEM THE BIRTH OF A CRISIS... A CITY ON THE VERGE OF MARTIAL LAW.
REPORTS HAVE BEEN COMING IN ALL DAY OF A KILLER ROBOT NEAR TENTH AVENUE!
DO YOU BELIEVE THE REPORTS, SARGE?
POLICE
IF THE PEOPLE LIVING IN THIS NEIGHBORHOOD DO, WE'RE GOING TO HAVE A PANIC ON OUR HANDS!
HURRY, MEN! GET THOSE SANDBAGS IN PLACE!
WHAT ARE SANDBAGS GONNA DO AGAINST A KILLER ALIEN?
WE'RE CORDONING OFF THE AREA IN CASE OF A RIOT, SOLDIER-- NOT SOME SPACEMAN!
WE INTERRUPT ALL PROGRAMMING TO ISSUE A GENERAL ALERT FOR THE TIMES SQUARE AREA!
REPAIR
GO TO YOUR HOMES! STAY OFF THE STREETS!
THIS SOUNDS SERIOUS!
EXTRY! EXTRY! READ ALL ABOUT THE "ALIEN MENACE AT LARGE" IN TONIGHT'S DAILY BUGLE!
NO FACTS KNOWN! NOTHING SUBSTANTIATED!
IS JAMESON REPORTING A PANIC--OR PROMOTING ONE?
DAILY BUGLE
ALIEN MENACE
OH, DEAR--I HOPE THE SUBWAYS ARE RUNNING!
WHAT'S GOING ON?
WE LIVE HERE-- WE GOT A RIGHT TO KNOW!
MOMMA, I'M SCARED!
THESE BARRICADES TO KEEP THE ALIEN FROM GETTIN' IN--OR TO KEEP US FROM GETTING OUT?
PLEASE, STAY CALM!
WE'RE SITTING ON A POWDER-KEG!
I WAS AFRAID OF THIS-- THE STORY ABOUT AN ALIEN ON THE LOOSE HAS CREATED A PANIC!
BUT I FELT IT WAS MY JOURNALISTIC DUTY TO PRINT IT!
IT DIDN'T HURT SALES ANY, EITHER! NO ONE CAN DAMPEN MY MOOD TONIGHT!
EXCEPT ...HIM!
2


AND OVER A ROOFTOP ACROSS FROM THE DAILY BUGLE...
THERE'S SUPPOSED TO BE AN ALIEN KILLER LOOSE IN THE CITY!
THE OL' SPIDEY-SENSES ARE TINGLING A BIT-- DETECTING A LOT OF LITTLE EVILS, BUT NOTHING LIKE A DEADLY CREATURE FROM OUTER SPACE!
AS THE AMAZING SPIDER-MAN SWINGS IN SEARCH...

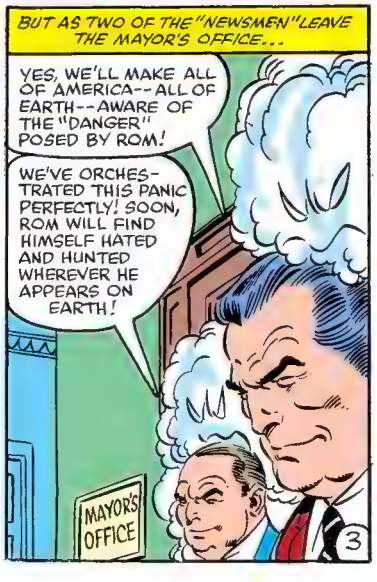

...THE BLIND SUPER HERO, DAREDEVIL, SCANS THE CITY AS ONLY HE CAN!
NOTHING! IF THERE IS AN ALIEN LIFE-FORM AT LARGE--
MY HYPERSENSES CANNOT PINPOINT IT!

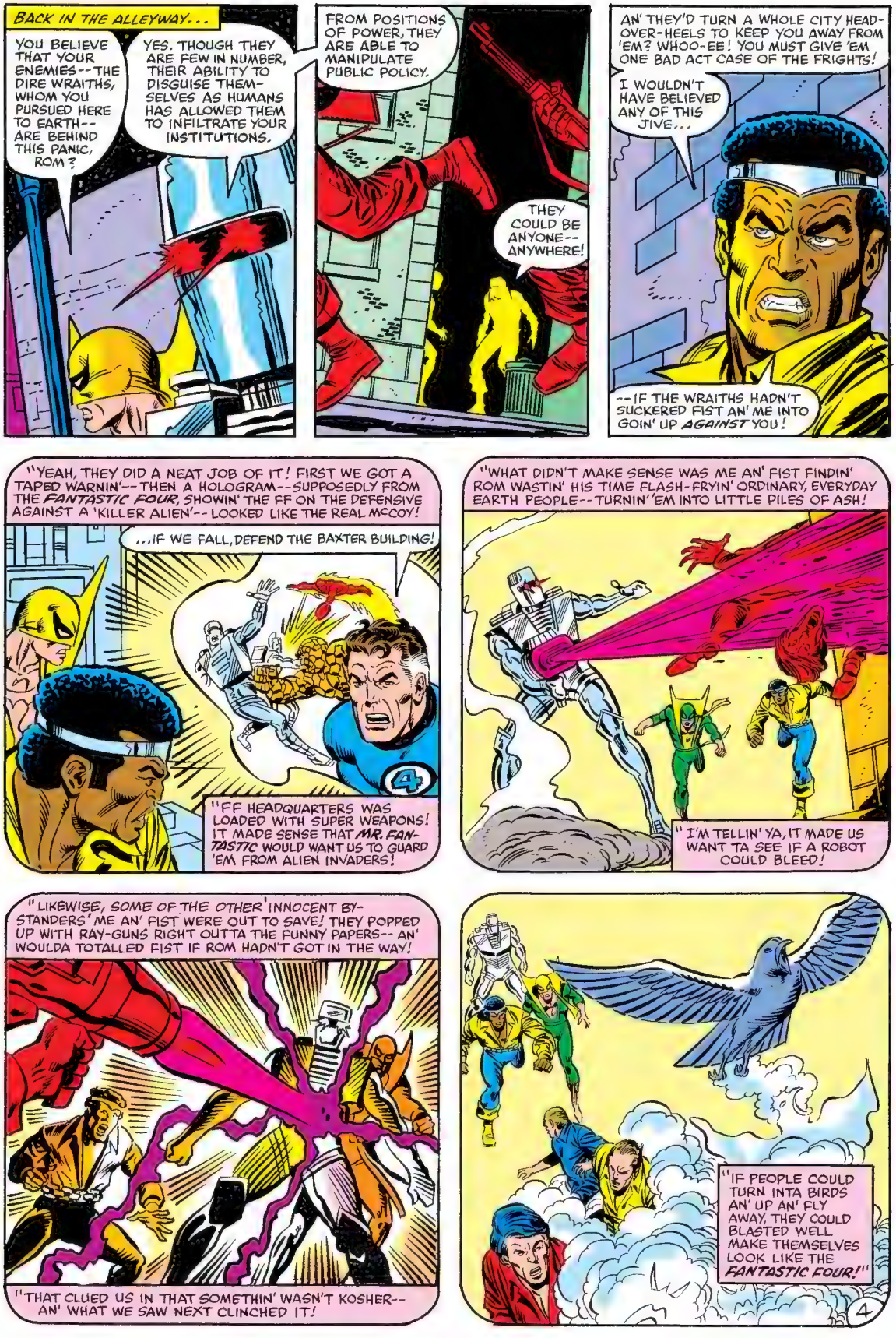
THE PANIC PERVADING NEW YORK IS SUPPOSED TO HAVE ITS ROOTS IN SOME ALIEN ROBOT--
--BUT SO FAR, MOON KNIGHT HAS BEEN UNABLE TO FIND IT!

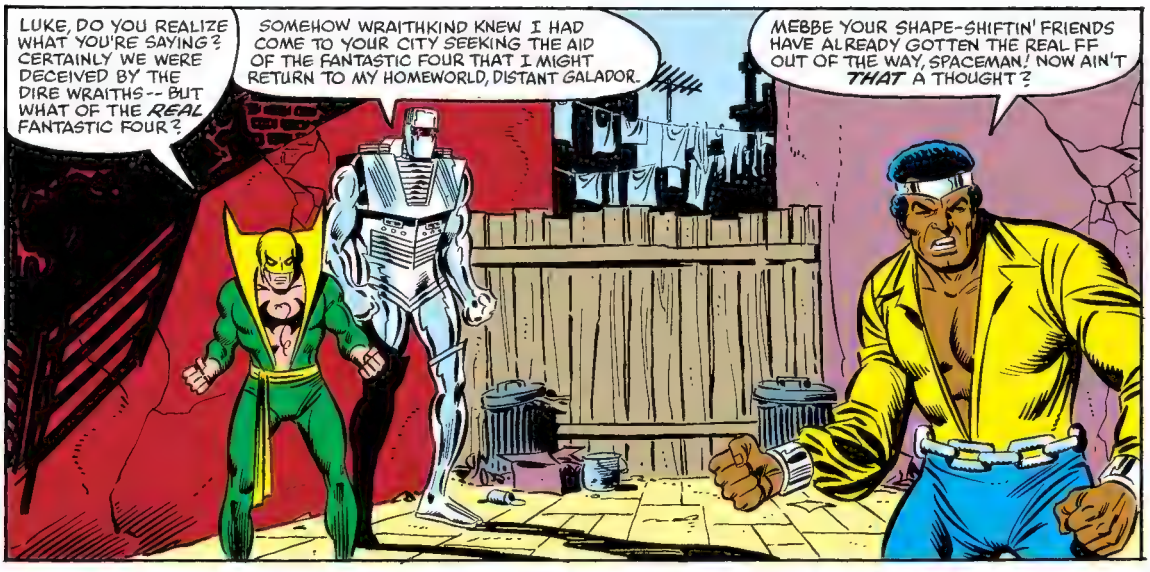
IS THERE REALLY AN ALIEN WREAKING DEATH AND DESTRUCTION THROUGHOUT THE CITY, OR ARE THE MEDIA ACTING IRRESPONSIBLY?
I GUESS THE ONLY WAY TO BE SURE IS FOR CAPTAIN AMERICA TO JOIN THE SEARCH!

ARE YOU NOT GOING TO JOIN THE HUNT FOR THE ALLEGED ALIEN, SIR?
NO, JARVIS. THE SIGHT OF A MAN ENCASED IN ARMOR MIGHT BE MISTAKEN FOR THE "ROBOT ALIEN." I DON'T WANT TO ADD TO THE PANIC.
TONIGHT IRON MAN WILL REMAIN AT AVENGERS' MANSION.

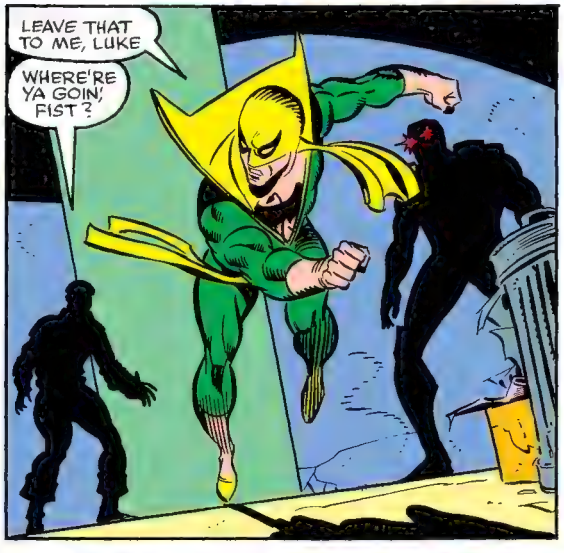
THE PANIC'S SPREADING! WE'VE GOT TO APPREHEND THAT ALIEN!
WE'RE DOING EVERYTHING POSSIBLE, MR. MAYOR!
REST ASSURED THE MEDIA WILL MAKE THE PUBLIC AWARE OF THE DANGER!


BUT AS TWO OF THE "NEWSMEN" LEAVE THE MAYOR'S OFFICE...
YES, WE'LL MAKE ALL OF AMERICA--ALL OF EARTH--AWARE OF THE "DANGER" POSED BY ROM!
WE'VE ORCHESTRATED THIS PANIC PERFECTLY! SOON, ROM WILL FIND HIMSELF HATED AND HUNTED WHEREVER HE APPEARS ON EARTH!
MAYOR'S OFFICE
3

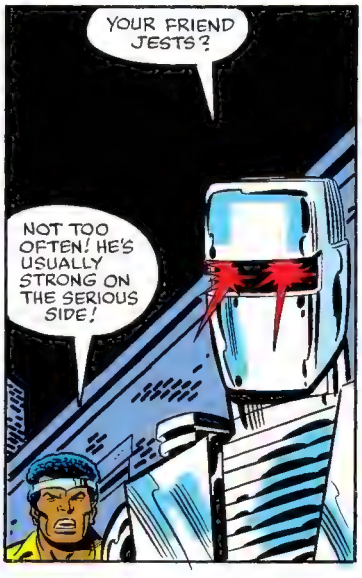

BACK IN THE ALLEYWAY...
YOU BELIEVE THAT YOUR ENEMIES--THE DIRE WRAITHS, WHOM YOU PURSUED HERE TO EARTH--ARE BEHIND THIS PANIC, ROM?
YES. THOUGH THEY ARE FEW IN NUMBER, THEIR ABILITY TO DISGUISE THEMSELVES AS HUMANS HAS ALLOWED THEM TO INFILTRATE YOUR INSTITUTIONS.
FROM POSITIONS OF POWER, THEY ARE ABLE TO MANIPULATE PUBLIC POLICY.
THEY COULD BE ANYONE--ANYWHERE!
AN' THEY'D TURN A WHOLE CITY HEAD-OVER-HEELS TO KEEP YOU AWAY FROM 'EM? WHOO-EE! YOU MUST GIVE 'EM ONE BAD ACT CASE OF THE FRIGHTS!
I WOULDN'T HAVE BELIEVED ANY OF THIS JIVE...
--IF THE WRAITHS HADN'T SUCKERED FIST AN' ME INTO GOIN' UP AGAINST YOU!
"YEAH, THEY DID A NEAT JOB OF IT! FIRST WE GOT A TAPED WARNIN'--THEN A HOLOGRAM--SUPPOSEDLY FROM THE FANTASTIC FOUR, SHOWIN' THE FF ON THE DEFENSIVE AGAINST A 'KILLER ALIEN'--LOOKED LIKE THE REAL McCOY!
...IF WE FALL, DEFEND THE BAXTER BUILDING!
"FF HEADQUARTERS WAS LOADED WITH SUPER WEAPONS! IT MADE SENSE THAT MR. FANTASTIC WOULD WANT US TO GUARD 'EM FROM ALIEN INVADERS!
"WHAT DIDN'T MAKE SENSE WAS ME AN' FIST FINDIN' ROM WASTIN' HIS TIME FLASH-FRYIN' ORDINARY, EVERYDAY EARTH PEOPLE--TURNIN' 'EM INTO LITTLE PILES OF ASH!
"I'M TELLIN' YA, IT MADE US WANT TA SEE IF A ROBOT COULD BLEED!
"LIKEWISE, SOME OF THE OTHER INNOCENT BY-STANDERS' ME AN' FIST WERE OUT TO SAVE! THEY POPPED UP WITH RAY-GUNS RIGHT OUTTA THE FUNNY PAPERS--AN' WOULDA TOTALLED FIST IF ROM HADN'T GOT IN THE WAY!
"THAT CLUED US IN THAT SOMETHIN' WASN'T KOSHER--AN' WHAT WE SAW NEXT CLINCHED IT!
"IF PEOPLE COULD TURN INTA BIRDS AN' UP AN' FLY AWAY, THEY COULD BLASTED WELL MAKE THEMSELVES LOOK LIKE THE FANTASTIC FOUR!"
4


LUKE, DO YOU REALIZE WHAT YOU'RE SAYING? CERTAINLY WE WERE DECEIVED BY THE DIRE WRAITHS-- BUT WHAT OF THE REAL FANTASTIC FOUR?
SOMEHOW WRAITHKIND KNEW I HAD COME TO YOUR CITY SEEKING THE AID OF THE FANTASTIC FOUR THAT I MIGHT RETURN TO MY HOMEWORLD, DISTANT GALADOR.
MEBBE YOUR SHAPE-SHIFTIN' FRIENDS HAVE ALREADY GOTTEN THE REAL FF OUT OF THE WAY, SPACEMAN! NOW AIN'T THAT A THOUGHT?

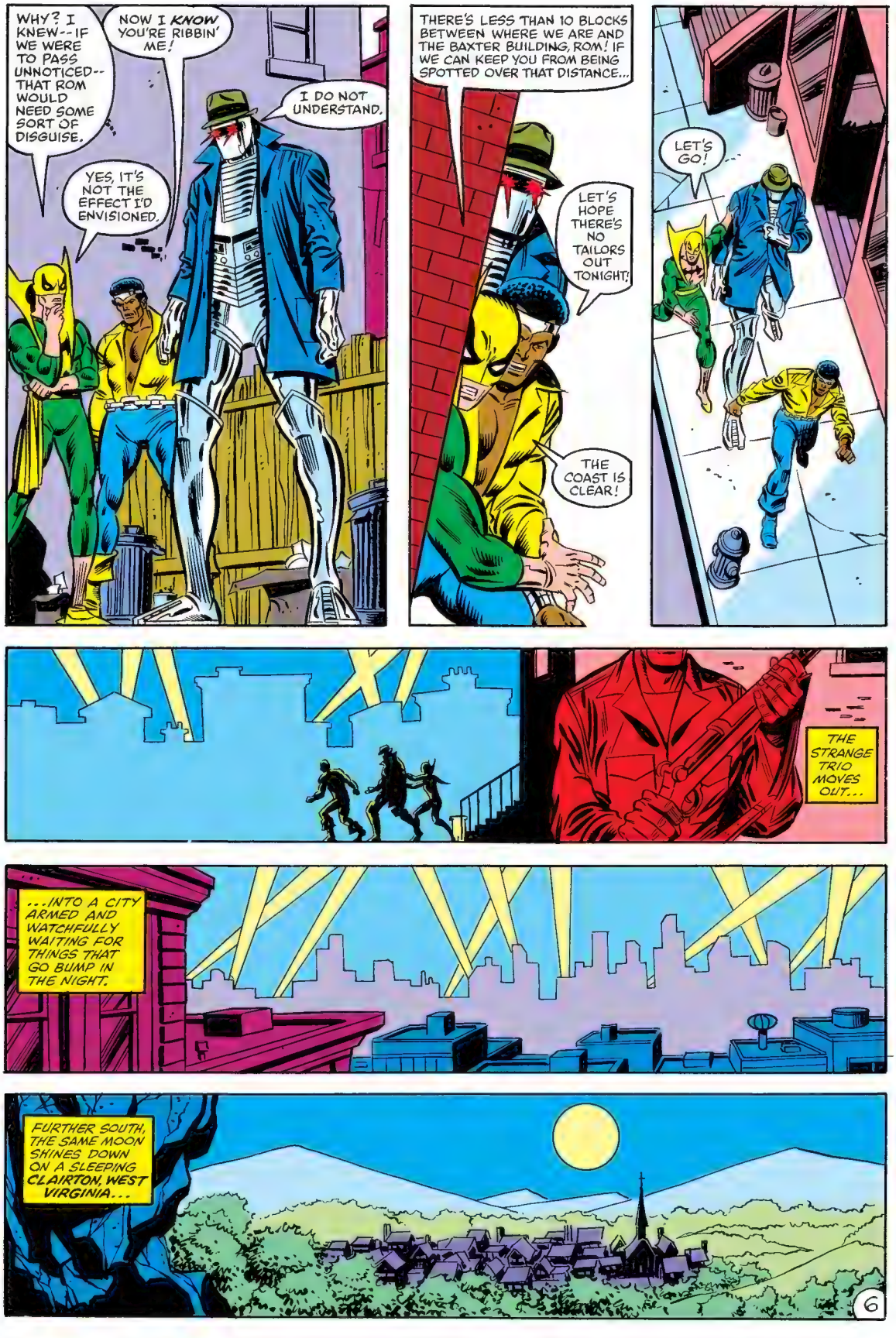
I USED TA BE IN THE FF--ON A TEMPORARY BASIS! * I KNOW HOW TOUGH THOSE DUDES ARE! IF THEY WERE DEFEATED--OR WORSE-- BY THE WRAITHS...
I'M BEGINNIN' TO HAVE A NASTY FEELIN' ABOUT THIS, SILVER-SOCKS!
WE CAN'T STAY HERE! I THINK I KNOW HOW TA TELL THE REAL FF FROM A FAKE, BUT WE GOTTA REACH THE BAXTER BUILDING TA FIND OUT! ROM'S ROCKET PACK GOT TOTALLED WHEN WE TANGLED BEFORE--
--SO NOW HOW DO WE SMUGGLE HIM THROUGH A CITY GONE BANANAS?
* FF #168-170. -- AL.


LEAVE THAT TO ME, LUKE
WHERE'RE YA GOIN', FIST?

SHOPPING!


YOUR FRIEND JESTS?
NOT TOO OFTEN! HE'S USUALLY STRONG ON THE SERIOUS SIDE!

MOMENTS LATER...
THESE ARE THE LARGEST SIZES I COULD FIND!
HOW--?
CREDIT.
FIST, I'M BEGINNIN' TO FEEL LIKE A STRAIGHT MAN ON A COMEDY TEAM!
5


WHY? I KNEW--IF WE WERE TO PASS UNNOTICED--THAT ROM WOULD NEED SOME SORT OF DISGUISE.
NOW I KNOW YOU'RE RIBBIN' ME!
I DO NOT UNDERSTAND.
YES, IT'S NOT THE EFFECT I'D ENVISIONED.
THERE'S LESS THAN 10 BLOCKS BETWEEN WHERE WE ARE AND THE BAXTER BUILDING, ROM! IF WE CAN KEEP YOU FROM BEING SPOTTED OVER THAT DISTANCE...
LET'S HOPE THERE'S NO TAILORS OUT TONIGHT!
THE COAST IS CLEAR!
LET'S GO!
THE STRANGE TRIO MOVES OUT...
...INTO A CITY ARMED AND WATCHFULLY WAITING FOR THINGS THAT GO BUMP IN THE NIGHT.
FURTHER SOUTH, THE SAME MOON SHINES DOWN ON A SLEEPING CLAIRTON, WEST VIRGINIA...
6

THERE, IN AN APARTMENT IN THE CENTER OF TOWN...
BRANDY, HONEY, DO YOU REALIZE THAT THIS IS THE FIRST TIME WE'VE BEEN TRULY ALONE TOGETHER SINCE...
SINCE YOU WERE CAPTURED AND DUPLICATED, STEVE--AND ROM RETURNED IN TIME TO PREVENT ME FROM MARRYING A DIRE WRAITH DISGUISED AS YOU.
YEAH, AND DROVE THE WRAITHS FROM CLAIRTON!
AT LAST WE CAN GET BACK TO LEADING NORMAL LIVES AGAIN!
YES, I SUPPOSE SO...
OH, STEVE-- LOOK! THAT FLASH ACROSS THE NIGHT SKY! IT CAN ONLY MEAN THAT ROM HAS COME BACK!
BRANDY, THAT'S THE JET-TRAIL CAUSED BY CLAIRTON'S NEW RESIDENT SUPER HERO--THE TORPEDO! REMEMBER? ROM LEFT HIM BEHIND TO SAFEGUARD US AGAINST RENEWED WRAITH ACTIVITY WHILE ROM RETURNED TO GALADOR!
THE TORPEDO--? OH.
I'D HOPED ROM'S ABSENCE WOULD MAKE BRANDY REMEMBER THAT I'M THE GUY SHE'S SUPPOSED TO BE IN LOVE WITH...BUT IT'S NOT WORKING OUT THAT WAY!
STEVE JACKSON AND BRANDY CLARK ARE NOT THE ONLY CLAIRTONERS WITH WORRIED MINDS...
ROM'S GOT A LOT OF FAITH IN ME, BUT WHAT THE HECK'S THE TORPEDO SUPPOSED TO DO IF THE WRAITHS RETURN?
I CAN'T SEE 'EM LIKE ROM CAN! I DON'T HAVE ROM'S ENERGY ANALYZER TO REVEAL WHEN A WRAITH IS DISGUISED AS A HUMAN!
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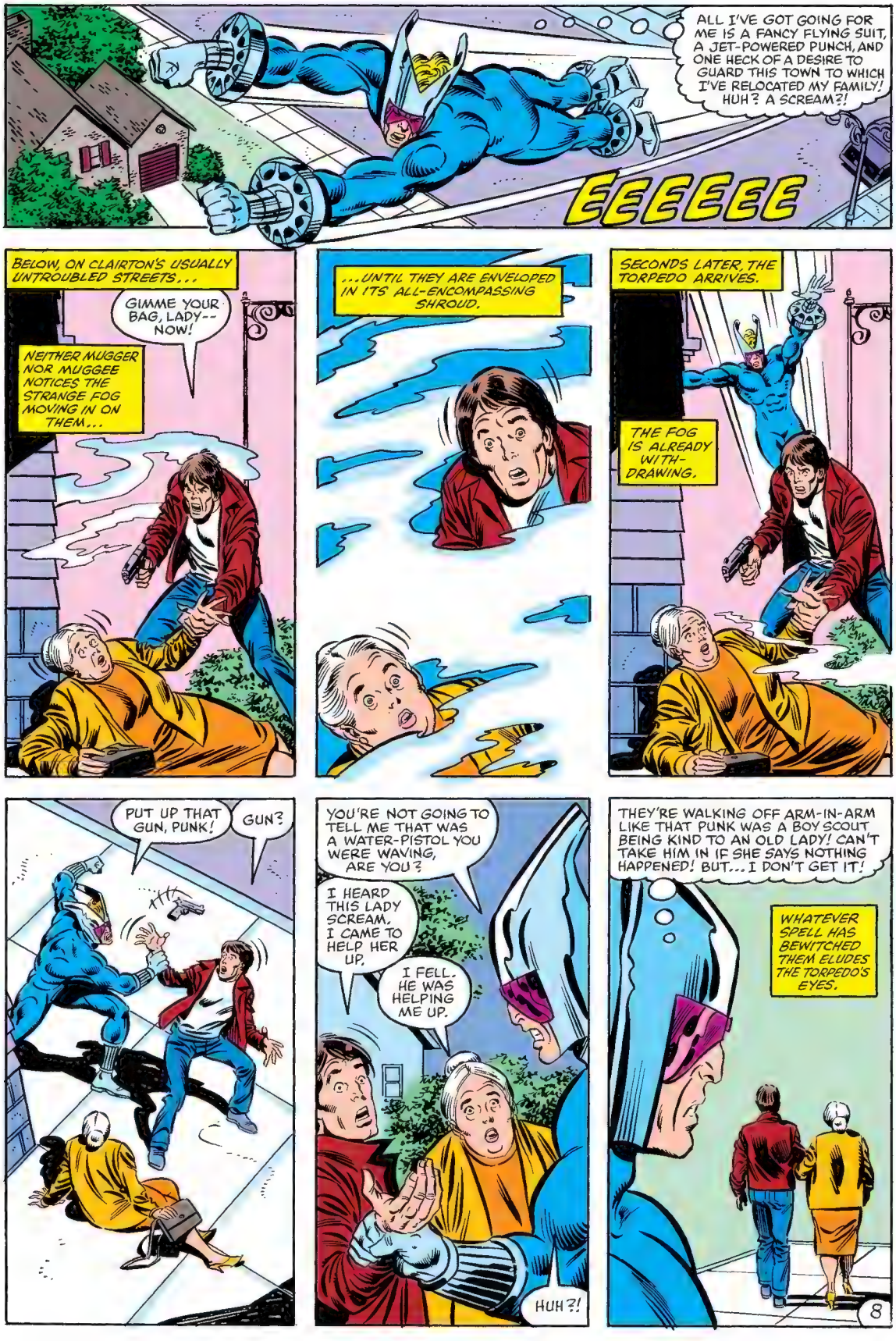
ALL I'VE GOT GOING FOR ME IS A FANCY FLYING SUIT, A JET-POWERED PUNCH, AND ONE HECK OF A DESIRE TO GUARD THIS TOWN TO WHICH I'VE RELOCATED MY FAMILY! HUH? A SCREAM?!
EEEEEE
BELOW, ON CLAIRTON'S USUALLY UNTROUBLED STREETS...
GIMME YOUR BAG, LADY-- NOW!
NEITHER MUGGER NOR MUGGEE NOTICES THE STRANGE FOG MOVING IN ON THEM...
...UNTIL THEY ARE ENVELOPED IN ITS ALL-ENCOMPASSING SHROUD.
SECONDS LATER, THE TORPEDO ARRIVES.
THE FOG IS ALREADY WITH-DRAWING.
PUT UP THAT GUN, PUNK!
GUN?
YOU'RE NOT GOING TO TELL ME THAT WAS A WATER-PISTOL YOU WERE WAVING, ARE YOU?
I HEARD THIS LADY SCREAM. I CAME TO HELP HER UP.
I FELL. HE WAS HELPING ME UP.
HUH?!
THEY'RE WALKING OFF ARM-IN-ARM LIKE THAT PUNK WAS A BOY SCOUT BEING KIND TO AN OLD LADY! CAN'T TAKE HIM IN IF SHE SAYS NOTHING HAPPENED! BUT... I DON'T GET IT!
WHATEVER SPELL HAS BEWITCHED THEM ELUDES THE TORPEDO'S EYES.
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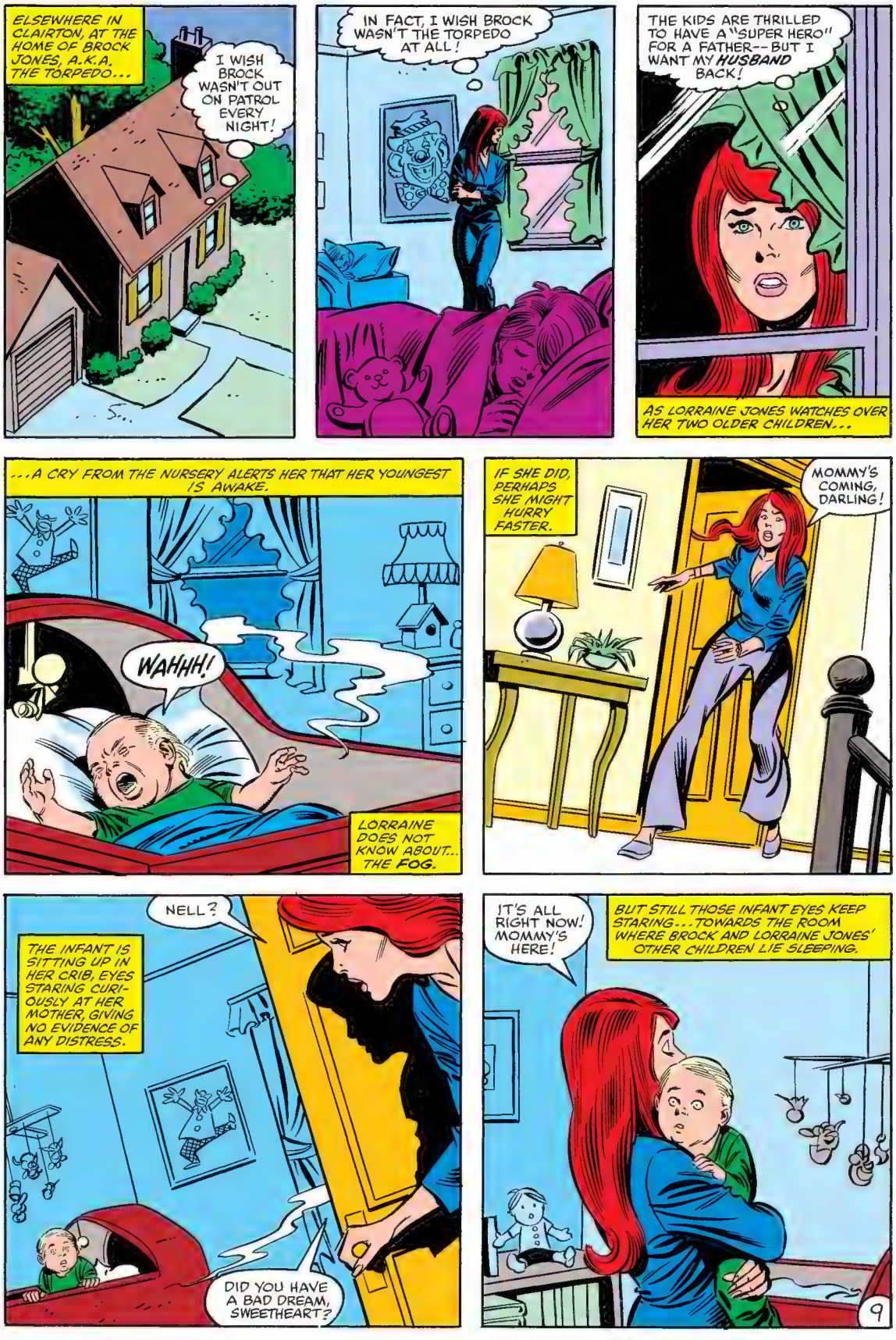
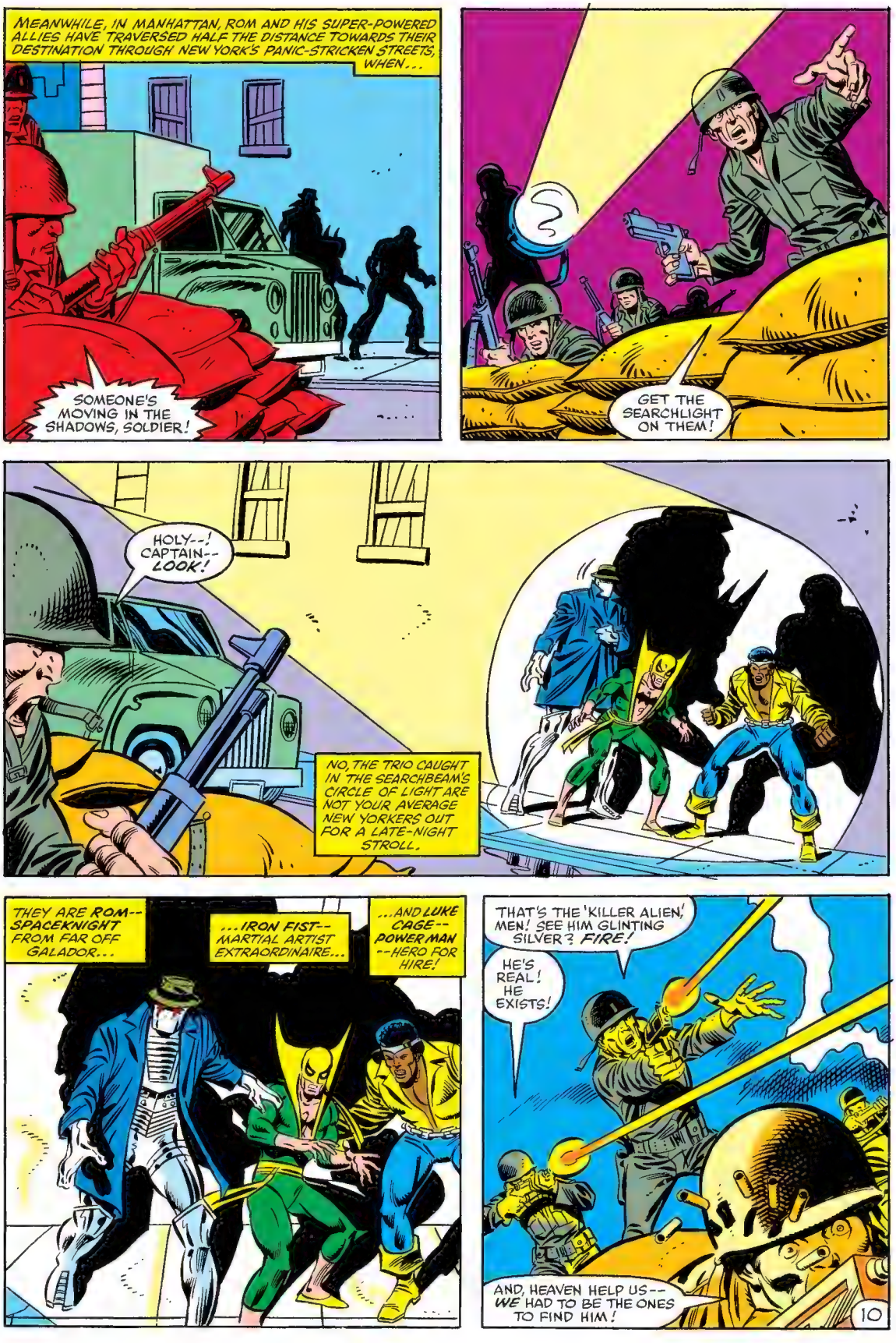
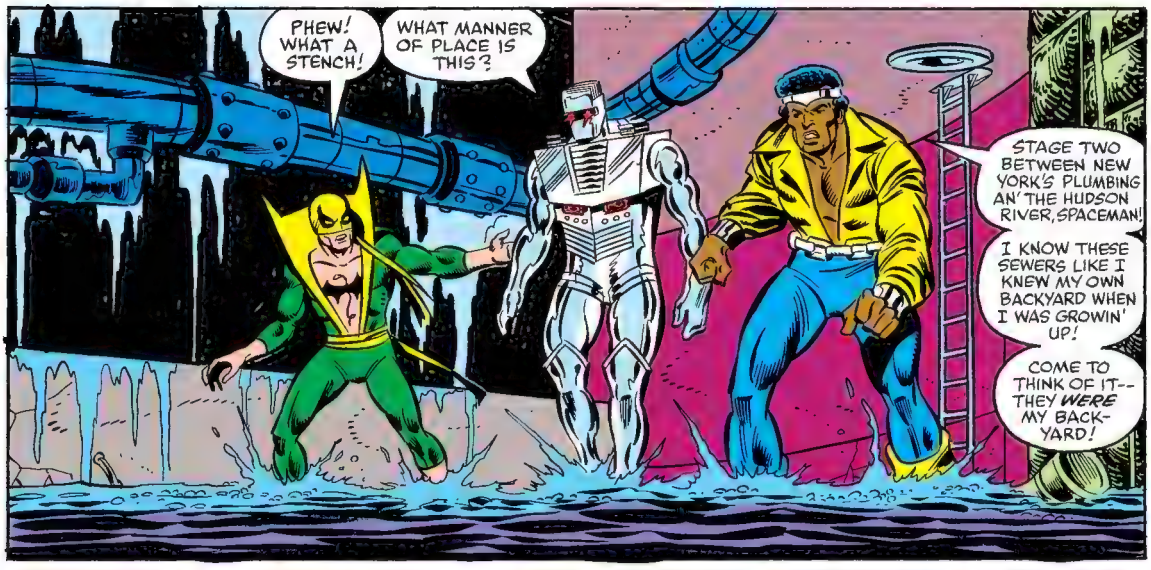
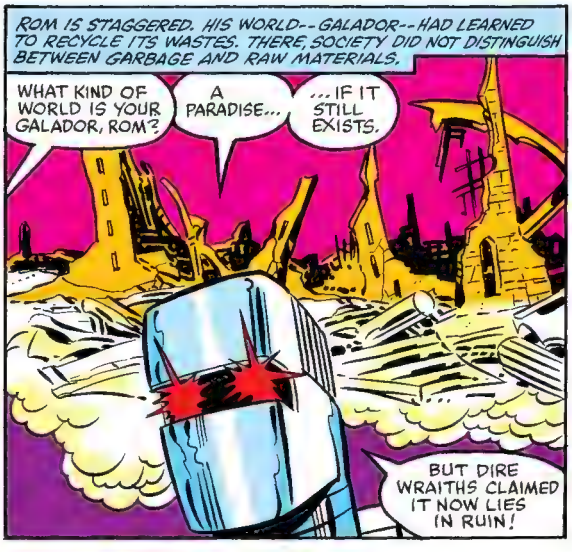

ELSEWHERE IN CLAIRTON, AT THE HOME OF BROCK JONES, A.K.A. THE TORPEDO...
I WISH BROCK WASN'T OUT ON PATROL EVERY NIGHT!
IN FACT, I WISH BROCK WASN'T THE TORPEDO AT ALL!
THE KIDS ARE THRILLED TO HAVE A "SUPER HERO" FOR A FATHER--BUT I WANT MY HUSBAND BACK!
AS LORRAINE JONES WATCHES OVER HER TWO OLDER CHILDREN...
...A CRY FROM THE NURSERY ALERTS HER THAT HER YOUNGEST IS AWAKE.
WAHHH!
LORRAINE DOES NOT KNOW ABOUT... THE FOG.
IF SHE DID, PERHAPS SHE MIGHT HURRY FASTER.
MOMMY'S COMING, DARLING!
NELL?
THE INFANT IS SITTING UP IN HER CRIB, EYES STARING CURIOUSLY AT HER MOTHER, GIVING NO EVIDENCE OF ANY DISTRESS.
DID YOU HAVE A BAD DREAM, SWEETHEART?
IT'S ALL RIGHT NOW! MOMMY'S HERE!
BUT STILL THOSE INFANT EYES KEEP STARING...TOWARDS THE ROOM WHERE BROCK AND LORRAINE JONES' OTHER CHILDREN LIE SLEEPING.
9

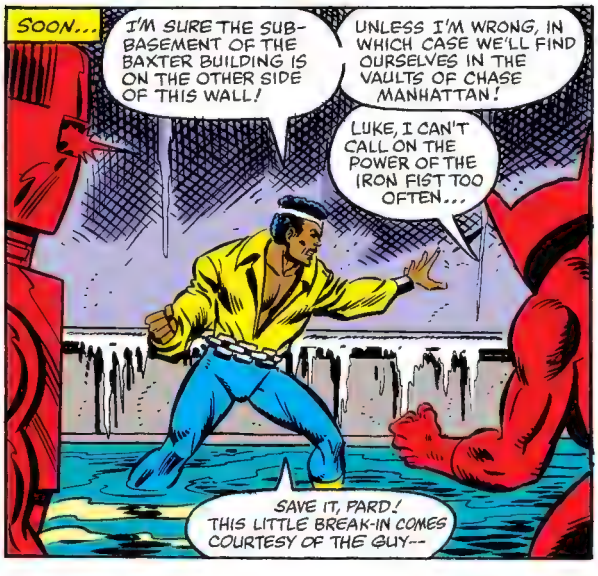

MEANWHILE, IN MANHATTAN, ROM AND HIS SUPER-POWERED ALLIES HAVE TRAVERSED HALF THE DISTANCE TOWARDS THEIR DESTINATION THROUGH NEW YORK'S PANIC-STRICKEN STREETS; WHEN...
SOMEONE'S MOVING IN THE SHADOWS, SOLDIER!
?
GET THE SEARCHLIGHT ON THEM!
HOLY--! CAPTAIN-- LOOK!
NO, THE TRIO CAUGHT IN THE SEARCHBEAM'S CIRCLE OF LIGHT ARE NOT YOUR AVERAGE NEW YORKERS OUT FOR A LATE-NIGHT STROLL.
THEY ARE ROM-- SPACEKNIGHT FROM FAR OFF GALADOR...
...IRON FIST-- MARTIAL ARTIST EXTRAORDINAIRE...
...AND LUKE CAGE-- POWER MAN --HERO FOR HIRE!
THAT'S THE 'KILLER ALIEN,' MEN! SEE HIM GLINTING SILVER? FIRE!
HE'S REAL! HE EXISTS!
AND, HEAVEN HELP US-- WE HAD TO BE THE ONES TO FIND HIM!
10

THE STACCATO COUGH OF AUTOMATIC WEAPONS' FIRE--THE VERY SOUND NEW YORK CITY HAS DREADED HEARING--SHATTERS THE STILLNESS OF THE NIGHT!
DIRECTED AT THE SUPPOSED 'KILLER ALIEN,' IT SHREDS ROM'S DISGUISE.
POWER MAN--IRON FIST... BEHIND ME.
I'M BULLETPROOF, SPACEMAN! LET ME COVER FIST, AN' THEN WE'LL TEAR INTO THOSE SOLDIER-BOYS!
NO. I DID NOT COME HERE TO FIGHT HUMANKIND--BUT TO SEEK ITS AID.
LOOK OUT! THE ALIEN'S GOING TO CRUSH US!
THAT TRUCK MUST WEIGH TEN TONS OR MORE!
DRAGON FIRE!
LET THIS VEHICLE SEPARATE US FROM THOSE WHO WOULD SLAY US!
SWEET MAMA!
WHOOM!
THEY'RE USING THE TRUCK FOR COVER! PUT THAT BAZOOKA TO GOOD USE, SOLDIER!
BLAST 'EM OUT OF THERE!
WHO WAS THAT WITH THE ALIEN?
WHO CARES?
PUWHOOM!
ALL RIGHT! LET'S GET 'EM!
BUT...
SIR, THEY'RE--
--GONE, DOWN INTO THE CITY'S SEWER SYSTEM!
IT'LL TAKE US FOREVER TO FLUSH THEM OUT OF THERE... SO TO SPEAK!
11


PHEW! WHAT A STENCH!
WHAT MANNER OF PLACE IS THIS?
STAGE TWO BETWEEN NEW YORK'S PLUMBING AN' THE HUDSON RIVER, SPACEMAN!
I KNOW THESE SEWERS LIKE I KNEW MY OWN BACKYARD WHEN I WAS GROWIN' UP!
COME TO THINK OF IT-- THEY WERE MY BACK-YARD!


ROM IS STAGGERED. HIS WORLD--GALADOR--HAD LEARNED TO RECYCLE ITS WASTES. THERE, SOCIETY DID NOT DISTINGUISH BETWEEN GARBAGE AND RAW MATERIALS.
WHAT KIND OF WORLD IS YOUR GALADOR, ROM?
A PARADISE...
...IF IT STILL EXISTS.
BUT DIRE WRAITHS CLAIMED IT NOW LIES IN RUIN!

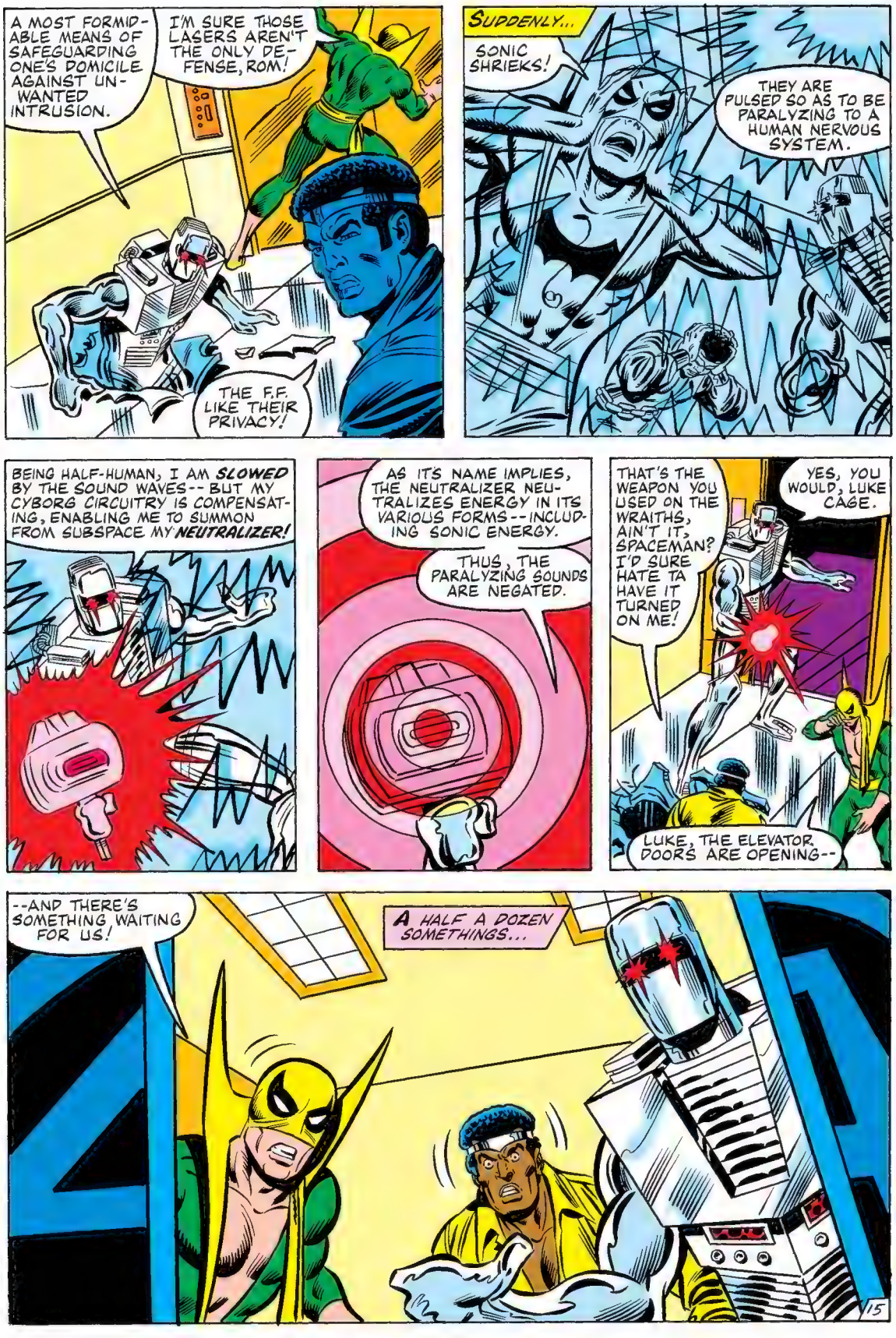
THAT IS WHAT I MUST RETURN TO ASCERTAIN.
WELL, WHOEVER TOLD YA THE FANTASTIC FOUR HAD THE MEANS TA GET YA THERE, WAS PROBABLY RIGHT ON! WHEN I WAS WITH 'EM, THEY TALKED ABOUT FLOGGIN' ALL OVER THE SOLAR SYSTEM ON ONE KINDA SPACESHIP OR ANOTHER!
ROM'S HOME PLANET IS OUT OF THIS GALAXY, LUKE.
SOLAR SYSTEM--GALAXY! WHAT'S THE DIFFERENCE! IF YA CAN GET THERE FROM HERE, THE FF GOT A WAY TA DO IT!

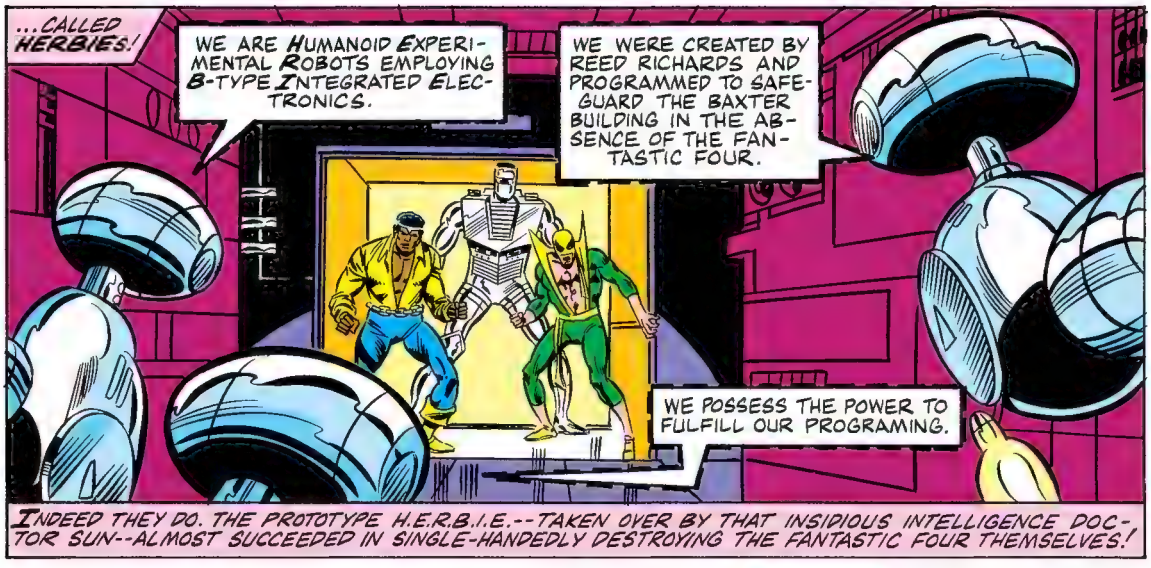

SOON...
I'M SURE THE SUB-BASEMENT OF THE BAXTER BUILDING IS ON THE OTHER SIDE OF THIS WALL!
UNLESS I'M WRONG, IN WHICH CASE WE'LL FIND OURSELVES IN THE VAULTS OF CHASE MANHATTAN!
LUKE, I CAN'T CALL ON THE POWER OF THE IRON FIST TOO OFTEN...
SAVE IT, PARD! THIS LITTLE BREAK-IN COMES COURTESY OF THE GUY--

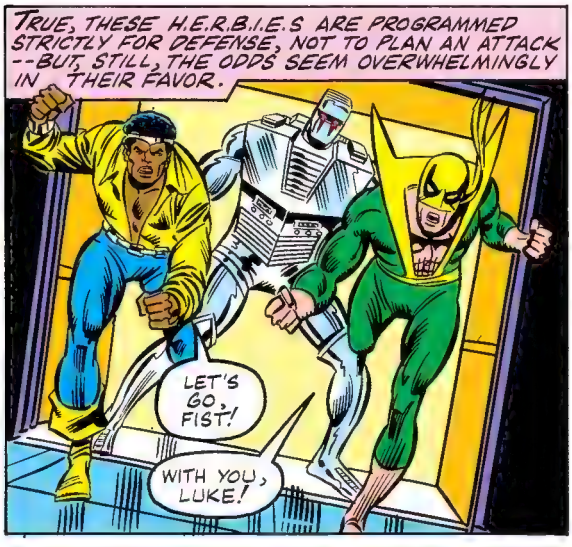
--WHO PUTS THE POW--
SHSKROW!
12

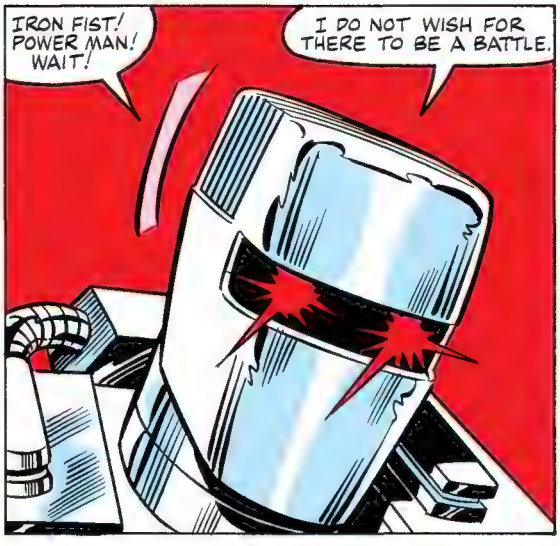
--IN POWER MAN!
TURBINES--GENERATORS--THE FANTASTIC FOUR HAVE THEIR OWN PRIVATE POWER-PLANT DOWN HERE!
SOMETHIN'S GOTTA MAKE THE CLOCKS RUN, UP THERE IN F.F. HEADQUARTERS!
UP AHEAD--THAT'S THE F.F.'S SPECIAL EXPRESS-ELEVATOR! DOORS ARE LOCKED...
...BUT HAVIN' ONCE BEEN A MEMBER, I STILL CARRY AROUND--
--THE KEY!
HUH? NUTHIN'! THEY MUSTA CHANGED THE LOCKS!
OF ALL THE--!
LET ME BY, LUKE! NO MATTER WHAT THOSE DOORS ARE MADE OF, MY IRON FIST WILL...
NO. YOU HAVE ALREADY SAID THAT YOU MUST CONSERVE YOUR POWER.
I WILL GAIN ACCESS FOR US, TO WHATEVER LIES BEYOND THESE PORTALS.
SKRKK-
13

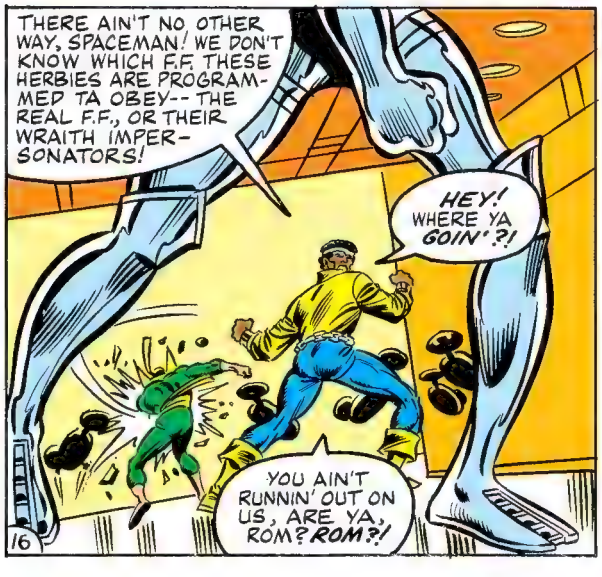
--KRASHAK!
AGAIN, THE EARTH HEROES MARVEL AT THE GALADORIAN'S MIGHT, AS THE ELEVATOR SHAFT IS EASILY EXPOSED.
OUR DESTINATION--?
...IS UP THERE, ROM!
FORTY-FOUR FLOORS! AND, SINCE THE ELEVATOR'S NOT GOING TO COME DOWN TO US--
--WE'RE GOING TO HAVE TO GO HAND-OVER-HAND UP THESE CABLES TO THE TOP!
SPACEMAN, AIN'T YOU LISTENIN'?
THE CABLES WOULD NEVER SUPPORT MY WEIGHT, EARTHLING.
CRUNCH
I MUST EMPLOY ANOTHER MODE OF ASCENT.
THEY CLIMB UNTIL, THIRTY-EIGHT STORIES UP...
LASER BEAMS SIZZLIN' OUTTA THE WALLS!
WE MUST HAVE UNKNOWINGLY TRIPPED AN INTRUDER ALARM!
THE LASERS AVOID THE ELEVATOR CAR ITSELF!
FAT LOTTA GOOD THAT DOES US! WE AIN'T INSIDE IT!
SPAKOW!
NOW WE ARE, LUKE!
14

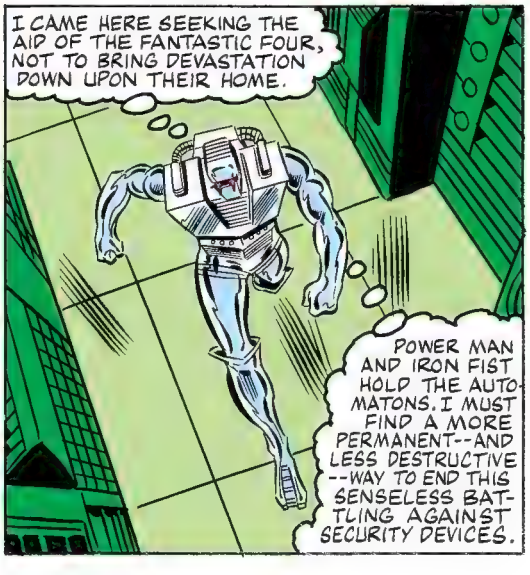

A MOST FORMIDABLE MEANS OF SAFEGUARDING ONE'S DOMICILE AGAINST UNWANTED INTRUSION.
I'M SURE THOSE LASERS AREN'T THE ONLY DEFENSE, ROM!
THE F.F. LIKE THEIR PRIVACY!
SUDDENLY...
SONIC SHRIEKS!
THEY ARE PULSED SO AS TO BE PARALYZING TO A HUMAN NERVOUS SYSTEM.
BEING HALF-HUMAN, I AM SLOWED BY THE SOUND WAVES-- BUT MY CYBORG CIRCUITRY IS COMPENSATING, ENABLING ME TO SUMMON FROM SUBSPACE MY NEUTRALIZER!
AS ITS NAME IMPLIES, THE NEUTRALIZER NEUTRALIZES ENERGY IN ITS VARIOUS FORMS--INCLUDING SONIC ENERGY.
THUS, THE PARALYZING SOUNDS ARE NEGATED.
THAT'S THE WEAPON YOU USED ON THE WRAITHS, AIN'T IT, SPACEMAN? I'D SURE HATE TA HAVE IT TURNED ON ME!
YES, YOU WOULD, LUKE CAGE.
LUKE, THE ELEVATOR DOORS ARE OPENING--
--AND THERE'S SOMETHING WAITING FOR US!
A HALF A DOZEN SOMETHINGS...
15

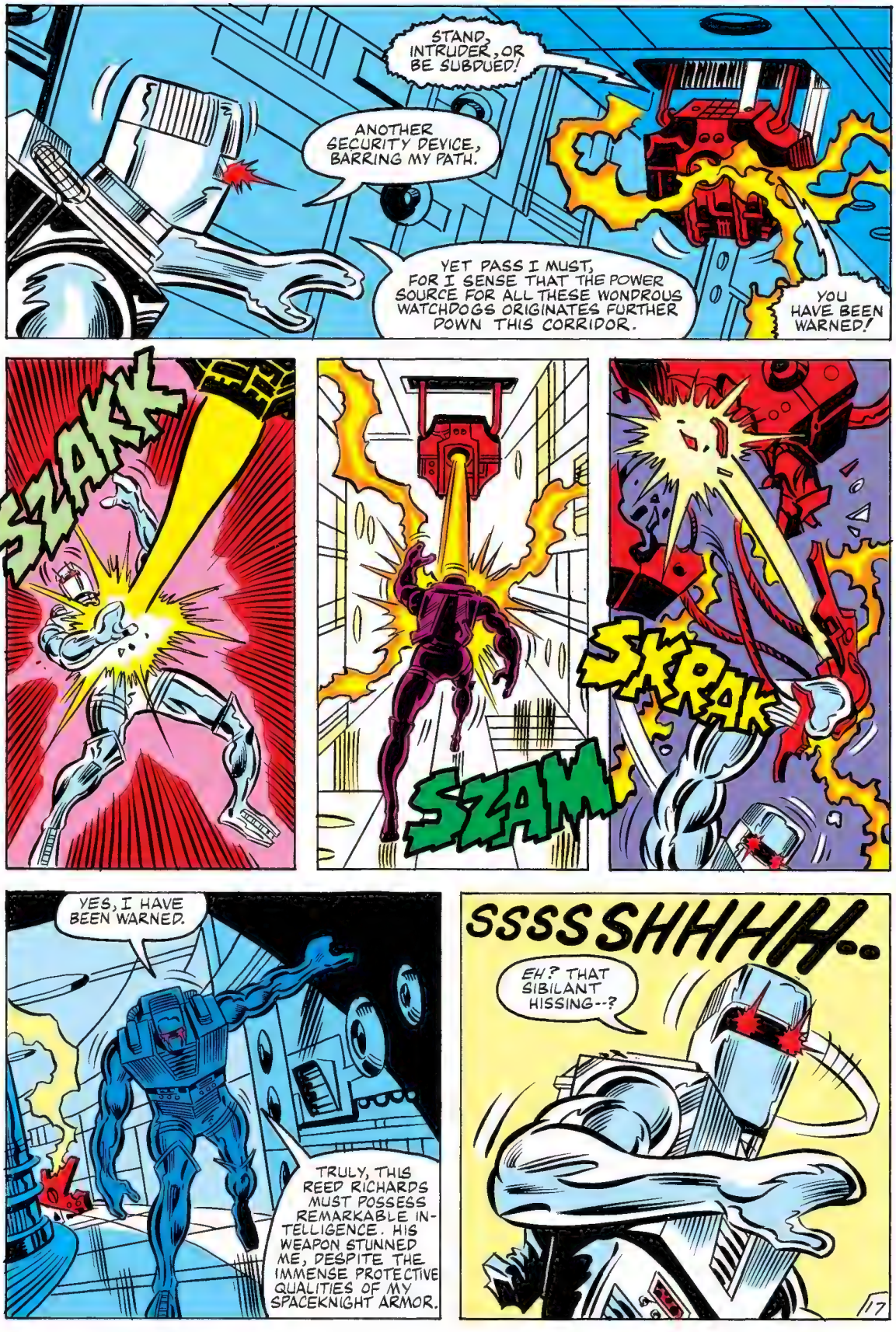

...CALLED HERBIES!
WE ARE HUMANOID EXPERIMENTAL ROBOTS EMPLOYING B-TYPE INTEGRATED ELECTRONICS.
WE WERE CREATED BY REED RICHARDS AND PROGRAMMED TO SAFEGUARD THE BAXTER BUILDING IN THE ABSENCE OF THE FANTASTIC FOUR.
WE POSSESS THE POWER TO FULFILL OUR PROGRAMING.
INDEED THEY DO. THE PROTOTYPE H.E.R.B.I.E.--TAKEN OVER BY THAT INSIDIOUS INTELLIGENCE DOCTOR SUN--ALMOST SUCCEEDED IN SINGLE-HANDEDLY DESTROYING THE FANTASTIC FOUR THEMSELVES!

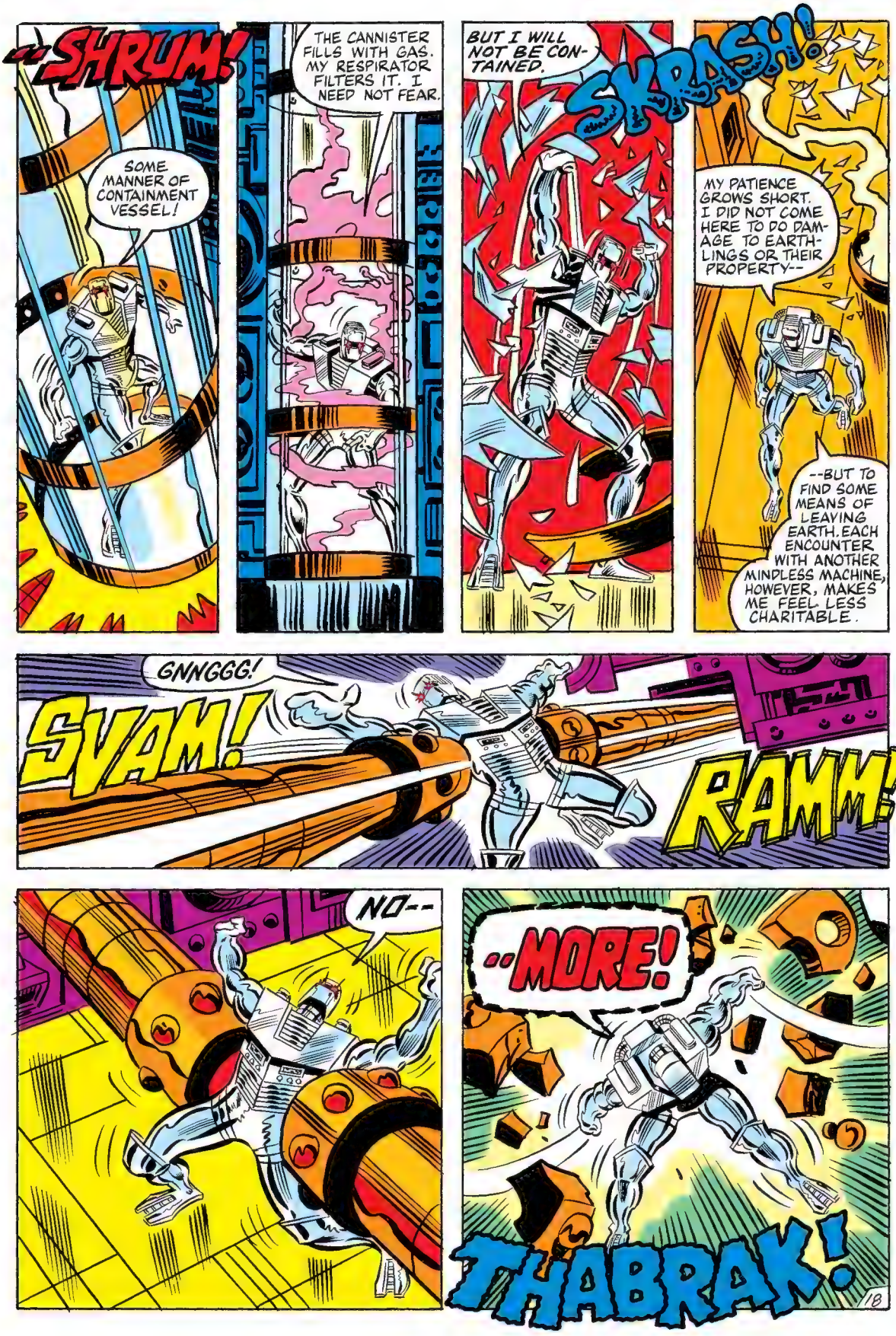

TRUE, THESE H.E.R.B.I.E.S ARE PROGRAMMED STRICTLY FOR DEFENSE, NOT TO PLAN AN ATTACK --BUT, STILL, THE ODDS SEEM OVERWHELMINGLY IN THEIR FAVOR.
LET'S GO, FIST!
WITH YOU, LUKE!

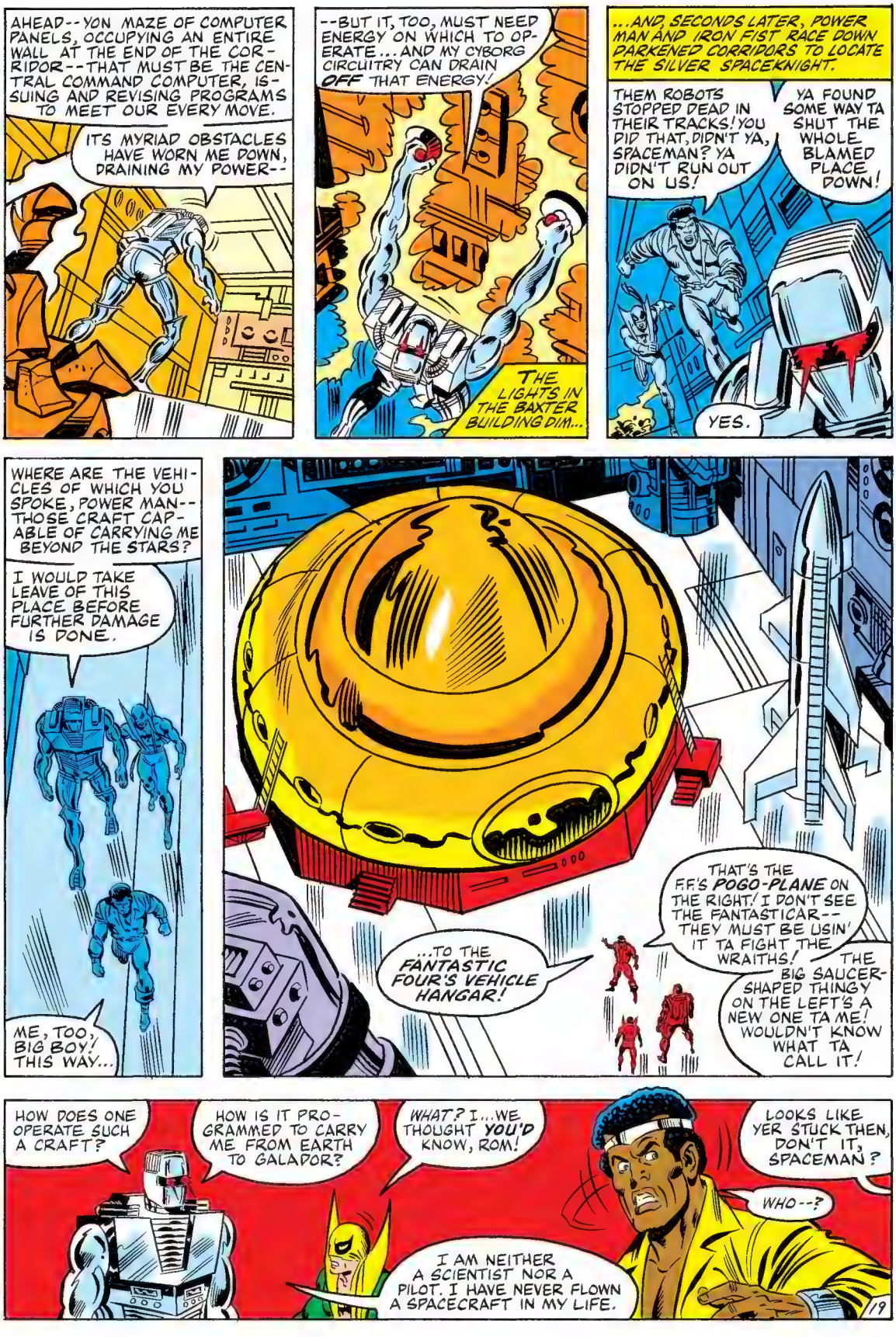

IRON FIST! POWER MAN! WAIT!
I DO NOT WISH FOR THERE TO BE A BATTLE.


THERE AIN'T NO OTHER WAY, SPACEMAN! WE DON'T KNOW WHICH F.F. THESE HERBIES ARE PROGRAMMED TA OBEY-- THE REAL F.F., OR THEIR WRAITH IMPERSONATORS!
HEY! WHERE YA GOIN'?!
YOU AIN'T RUNNIN' OUT ON US, ARE YA, ROM? ROM?!
16


I CAME HERE SEEKING THE AID OF THE FANTASTIC FOUR, NOT TO BRING DEVASTATION DOWN UPON THEIR HOME.
POWER MAN AND IRON FIST HOLD THE AUTOMATONS. I MUST FIND A MORE PERMANENT--AND LESS DESTRUCTIVE --WAY TO END THIS SENSELESS BATTLING AGAINST SECURITY DEVICES.


STAND, INTRUDER, OR BE SUBDUED!
ANOTHER SECURITY DEVICE, BARRING MY PATH.
YET PASS I MUST, FOR I SENSE THAT THE POWER SOURCE FOR ALL THESE WONDROUS WATCHDOGS ORIGINATES FURTHER DOWN THIS CORRIDOR.
YOU HAVE BEEN WARNED!
SZAKK
SZAM
SKRAK
YES, I HAVE BEEN WARNED.
TRULY, THIS REED RICHARDS MUST POSSESS REMARKABLE INTELLIGENCE. HIS WEAPON STUNNED ME, DESPITE THE IMMENSE PROTECTIVE QUALITIES OF MY SPACEKNIGHT ARMOR.
SSSSSHHHH..
EH? THAT SIBILANT HISSING--?
17


SHRUM!
SOME MANNER OF CONTAINMENT VESSEL!
THE CANNISTER FILLS WITH GAS. MY RESPIRATOR FILTERS IT. I NEED NOT FEAR.
BUT I WILL NOT BE CONTAINED.
SKRASH!
MY PATIENCE GROWS SHORT. I DID NOT COME HERE TO DO DAMAGE TO EARTHLINGS OR THEIR PROPERTY--
--BUT TO FIND SOME MEANS OF LEAVING EARTH. EACH ENCOUNTER WITH ANOTHER MINDLESS MACHINE, HOWEVER, MAKES ME FEEL LESS CHARITABLE.
GNNGGG!
SVAM!
RAMM!
NO--
--MORE!
THABRAK!
18


AHEAD--YON MAZE OF COMPUTER PANELS, OCCUPYING AN ENTIRE WALL AT THE END OF THE CORRIDOR--THAT MUST BE THE CENTRAL COMMAND COMPUTER, ISSUING AND REVISING PROGRAMS TO MEET OUR EVERY MOVE.
ITS MYRIAD OBSTACLES HAVE WORN ME DOWN, DRAINING MY POWER--
--BUT IT, TOO, MUST NEED ENERGY ON WHICH TO OPERATE... AND MY CYBORG CIRCUITRY CAN DRAIN OFF THAT ENERGY!
THE LIGHTS IN THE BAXTER BUILDING DIM...
...AND SECONDS LATER, POWER MAN AND IRON FIST RACE DOWN DARKENED CORRIDORS TO LOCATE THE SILVER SPACEKNIGHT.
THEM ROBOTS STOPPED DEAD IN THEIR TRACKS! YOU DID THAT, DIDN'T YA, SPACEMAN? YA DIDN'T RUN OUT ON US!
YA FOUND SOME WAY TA SHUT THE WHOLE BLAMED PLACE DOWN!
YES.
WHERE ARE THE VEHICLES OF WHICH YOU SPOKE, POWER MAN--THOSE CRAFT CAPABLE OF CARRYING ME BEYOND THE STARS?
I WOULD TAKE LEAVE OF THIS PLACE BEFORE FURTHER DAMAGE IS DONE.
ME, TOO, BIG BOY! THIS WAY...
...TO THE FANTASTIC FOUR'S VEHICLE HANGAR!
THAT'S THE F.F.'S POGO-PLANE ON THE RIGHT! I DON'T SEE THE FANTASTICAR--THEY MUST BE USIN' IT TA FIGHT THE WRAITHS!
THE BIG SAUCER-SHAPED THINGY ON THE LEFT'S A NEW ONE TA ME! WOULDN'T KNOW WHAT TA CALL IT!
HOW DOES ONE OPERATE SUCH A CRAFT?
HOW IS IT PROGRAMMED TO CARRY ME FROM EARTH TO GALADOR?
WHAT? I...WE THOUGHT YOU'D KNOW, ROM!
I AM NEITHER A SCIENTIST NOR A PILOT. I HAVE NEVER FLOWN A SPACECRAFT IN MY LIFE.
LOOKS LIKE YER STUCK THEN, DON'T IT, SPACEMAN?
WHO--?
19

LUKE--IT'S THEM! THE FANTASTIC FOUR!
OR THEIR WRAITH DOUBLES, FIST, IMITATIN' THE REAL F.F. TA STEAL THE WEAPONS SYSTEMS STORED IN THE BAXTER BUILDING!
MISTER, YOU JUST BROKE INTO OUR HOME AND HEADQUARTERS ACCOMPANIED BY THE VERY "KILLER ALIEN" THAT'S HAD THIS WHOLE CITY IN HYSTERIA, AND YOU HAVE DOUBTS ABOUT US?!?
THAT'S A LAUGH!
LEMME AT 'EM, REED! I NEVER DID LIKE IT WHEN I WUZ TEMPORARILY REPLACED BY "POWER HAM!"
LUKE, THEY DON'T SOUND LIKE DIRE WRAITHS!
C'MON, FIST--YA'D EXPECT AN ALIEN IMITATIN' THE F.F. TA DUPE THE SPEECH-PATTERNS! THAT AIN'T NO CLUE!
AN' IF THEY ARE WRAITHS--WITH THE F.F.'S POWERS--THEN WE'RE DEAD! FIGHTIN' AIN'T NO GOOD IN A CASE LIKE THIS!
I GOTTA USE MY HEAD INSTEADA MY FISTS!
MR. FANTASTIC--WHEN YOU HIRED ME ON, WE AGREED ON A CERTAIN SALARY IN EXCHANGE FOR MY SERVICES!
YOU REMEMBER WHAT IT WAS?
REED RICHARDS NAMES A FIGURE...
I DO.
...AND LUKE CAGE, HERO-FOR-HIRE, BREATHES A SIGH OF RELIEF.
OKAY! THEY'RE THE REAL F.F., ALL RIGHT! NO WRAITH COULDDA KNOWN THAT!
NOW LET ME INTRODUCE YA TA ROM, AN' LET YA IN ON THE REASON FOR THIS HERE LATE-NIGHT SOCIAL CALL...
20

SKEPTICAL, AS LUKE'S STORY FIRST UNFOLDS, THE FANTASTIC FOUR NONETHELESS SOON COME TO BELIEVE IT AND AGREE TO HELP ROM.
WRAITHS IMITATING HUMANS AND LIVING HERE ON EARTH? IT SOUNDS INCREDIBLE!
THE SKRULLS CHANGE SHAPE, SUE-- SO WHY IS IT HARD TO BELIEVE OTHER RACES CAN DO SO?
I STILL CAN'T BELIEVE YA PAID POWER MAN THAT MUCH MONEY!
REED RICHARDS LEADS ROM ABOARD THE SAUCER-SHAPED SHIP DOCKED IN THE HANGAR.
WE CAPTURED THIS SAUCER FROM THE SKRULLS YEARS AGO! IT'S POWERED BY WARP-DRIVE TO TRAVEL THROUGH HYPERSPACE!
I'VE PROGRAMMED IT WITH THE COORDINATES YOU GAVE ME FOR GALADOR!
YOU HAVE ALL SHOWN ME A SIDE TO HUMANITY I HAVE SEEN TOO SELDOM IN MY TIME ON EARTH. I CANNOT FIND THE WORDS TO EXPRESS MY GRATITUDE...
YOU'VE MADE US AWARE OF A DANGER TO EARTH--
--WHICH YOU'VE THUS FAR COMBATTED SINGLE-HANDEDLY! WE OWE YOU, ROM! GOOD LUCK!
SOUNDLESSLY, THE SKRULL SAUCER BEARING ROM LIFTS OFF FROM THE BAXTER BUILDING.
FAREWELL, MY FRIENDS.
SOON, IT PASSES BEYOND EARTH'S ATMOSPHERE.
FAREWELL, EARTH.
THEN THERE ARE ONLY...
THE STARS!
... AND BEYOND.
AFTER ALL THESE YEARS, I AM GOING HOME!
MEANWHILE, BACK ON OUR BIG BLUE MARBLE...
ROM SHOULD BE WARPING INTO HYPERSPACE BY NOW.
I HOPE HE FINDS HIS WORLD THE PARADISE HE LEFT IT--AND NOT A WRAITH HELL.
YOU'LL CALL OFF THE STATE OF EMERGENCY, REED, BY TELLING THE MAYOR WE'VE DEFEATED AND DESTROYED THE "KILLER ALIEN"?
YES--BETTER THAT THAN THE TRUE STORY, SINCE AN UNDOCUMENTED REPORT OF HUMAN-DISGUISED WRAITHS, LIVING HERE ON EARTH, MIGHT CAUSE AN EVEN GRAVER CRISIS.
OH, LUKE--ONE LAST THING! YOUR QUESTION REGARDING YOUR SALARY, TO DETERMINE WHETHER I WAS THE REAL REED RICHARDS OR NOT, WAS INGENIOUS...
YEAH? SO?
SO WHAT IF THE WRAITHS HAD DUPLICATED THE F.F.'S BRAIN-PATTERNS AS WELL AS OUR PHYSICAL APPEARANCES, IN EFFECT LEARNING EVERYTHING THE REAL F.F. WOULD KNOW?
UH--!
LET'S GO, LUKE...FAST!
WE DON'T WANT TO GIVE AWAY TOO MUCH ABOUT NEXT ISSUE, SO WE'LL TEASE YOU WITH A QUESTION...
ANYONE REMEMBER NOVA?

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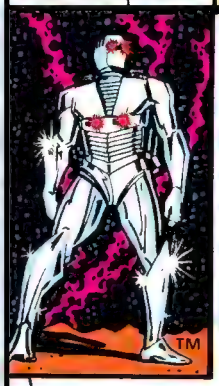
DETAILS INSIDE



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Two-hundred years ago, the evil Dire Wraiths threatened the peace-loving planet, Galador. In their homeworld's darkest hour, a thousand brave, young Galadorians sacrificed humanity itself to become Cyborg Warriors, a last desperate line of defense. Though hopelessly outnumbered, these Spaceknights triumphed, and pursued the remnants of the Wraith horde across the universe. Now, alone in the Enemy's mightiest stronghold, on a backward planet called Earth, one Galadorian Warrior faces his most awesome challenge.

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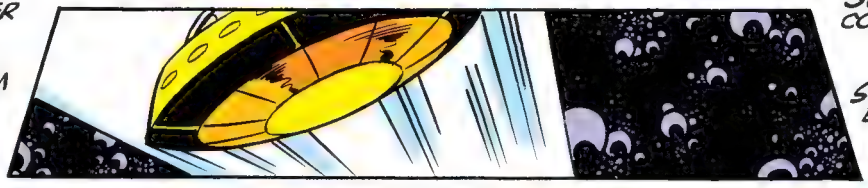
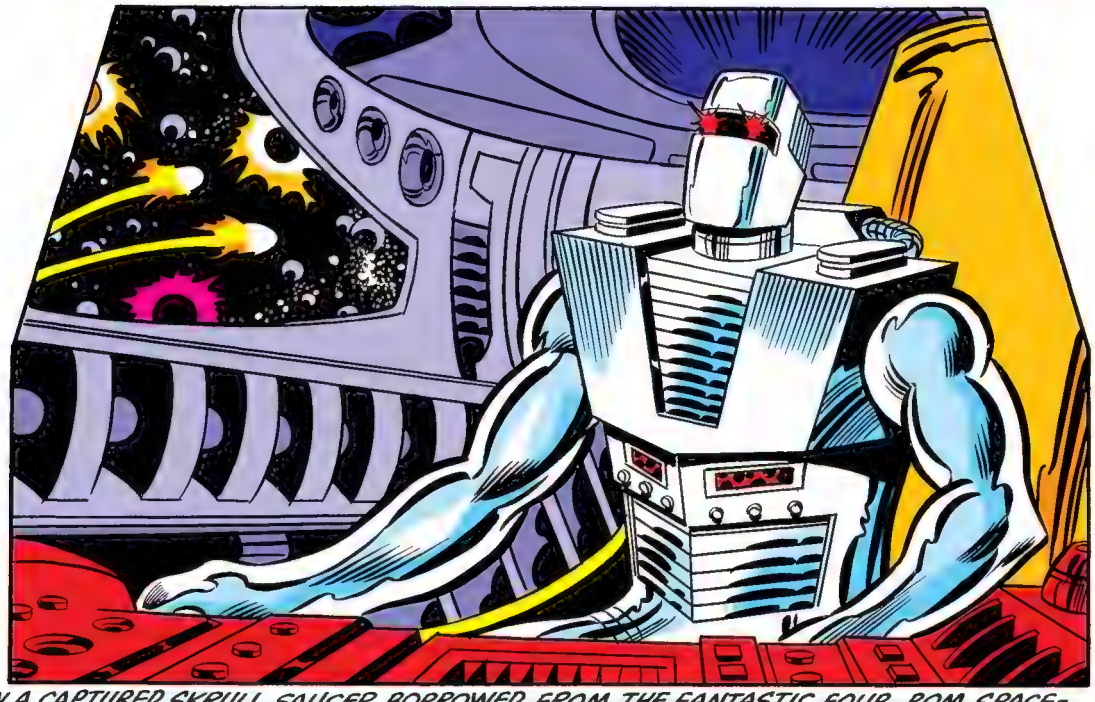
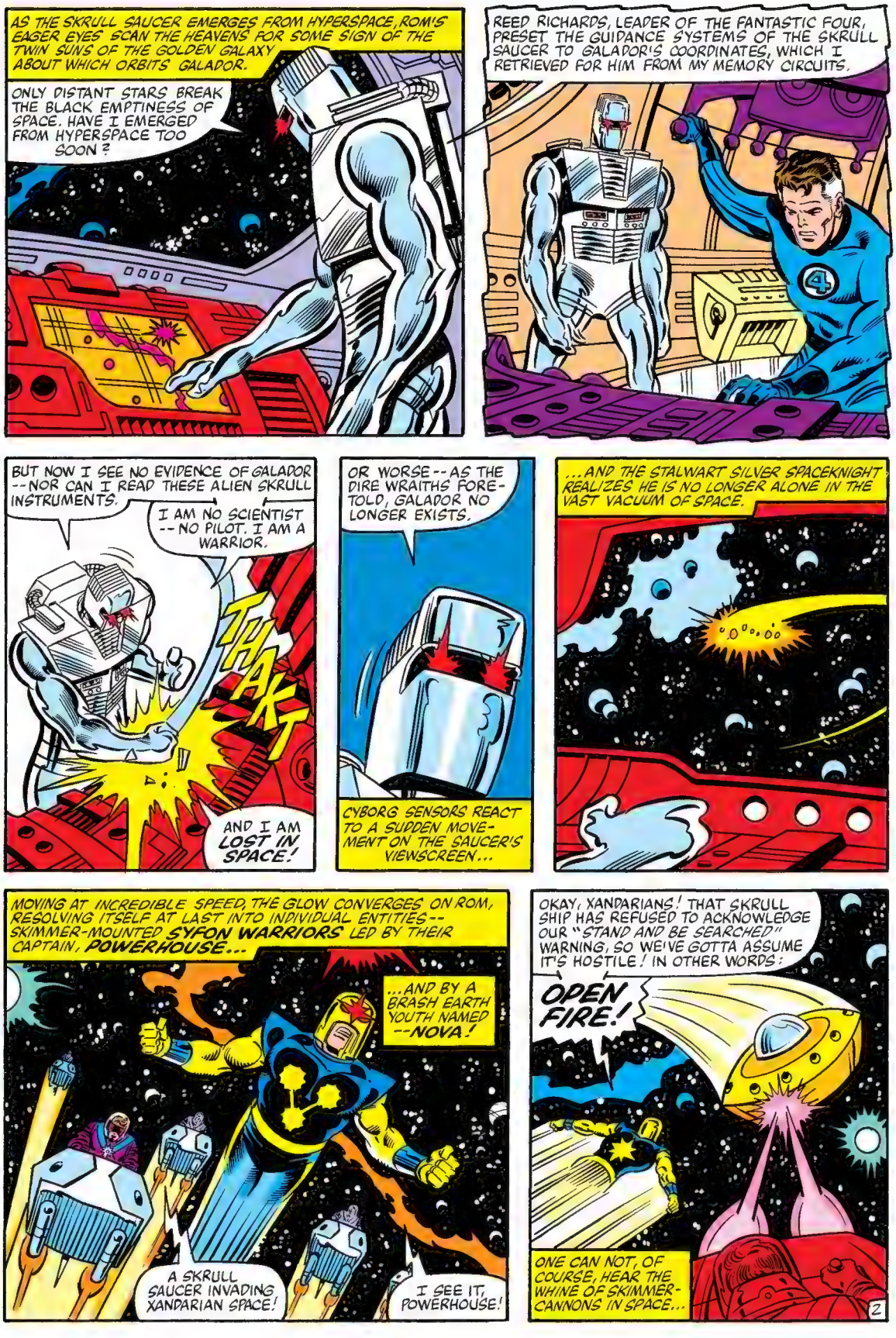
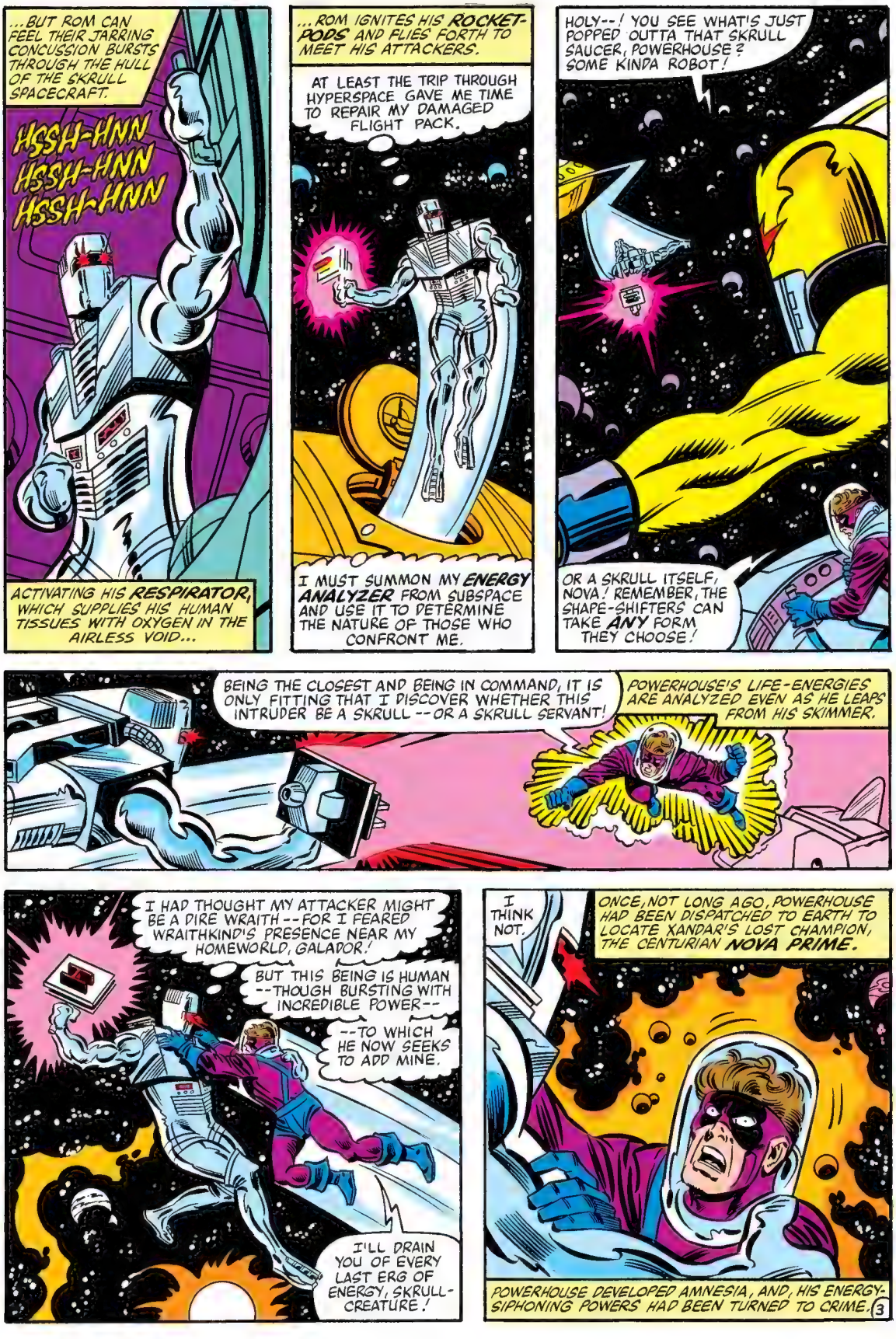


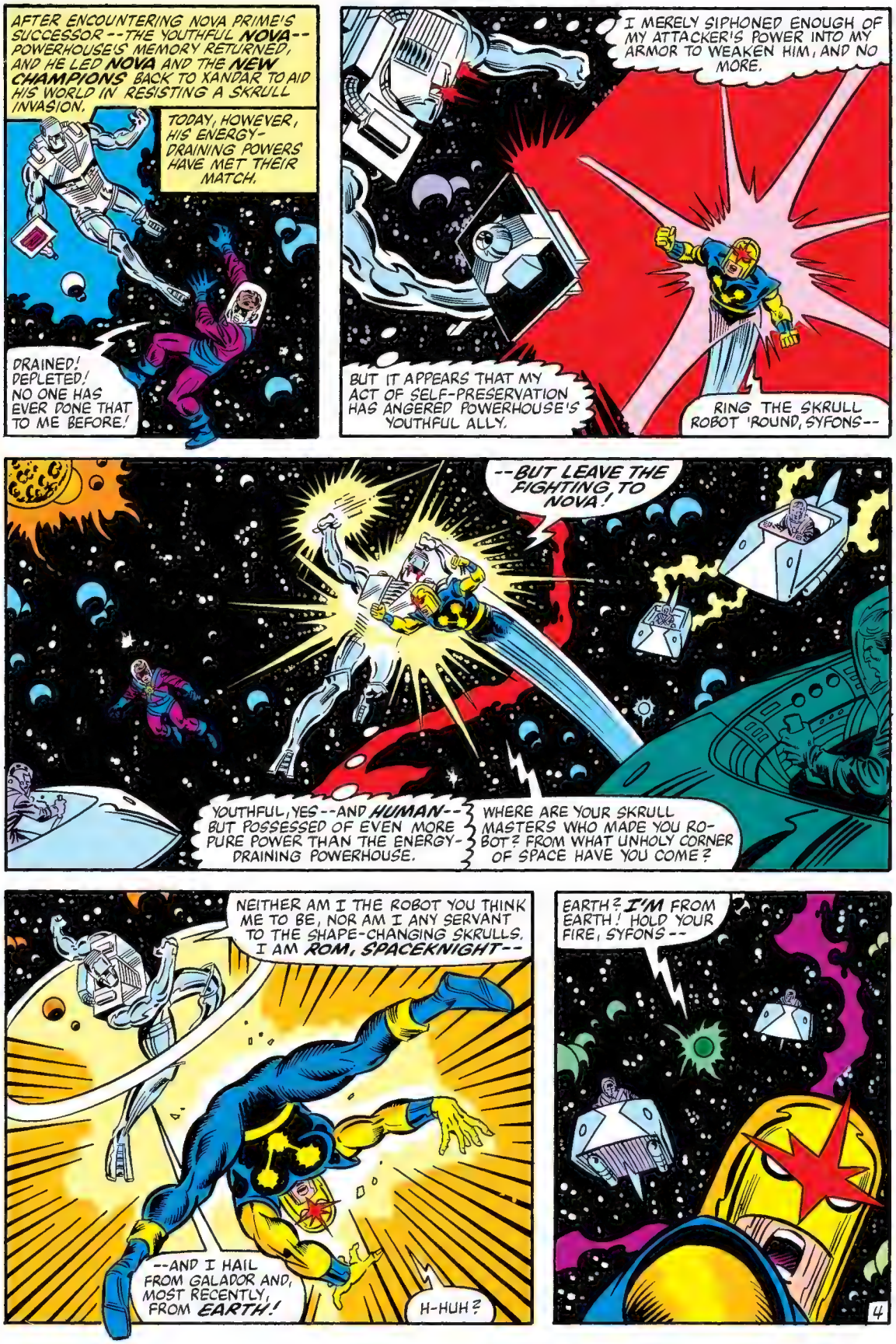


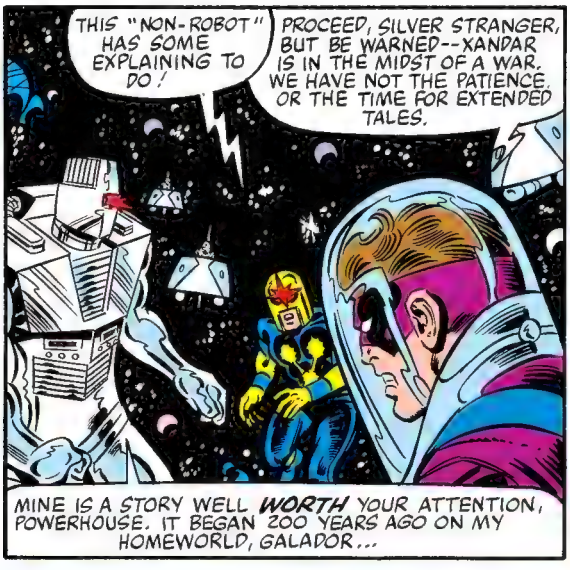
IN A CAPTURED SKRULL SAUCER, BORROWED FROM THE FANTASTIC FOUR, ROM, SPACE-KNIGHT HAS BEGUN A RETURN TRIP THROUGH HYPERSPACE TO GALADOR, THE PLANET OF HIS BIRTH. ALAS, HIS JOURNEY WILL END IN A UNIVERSE...

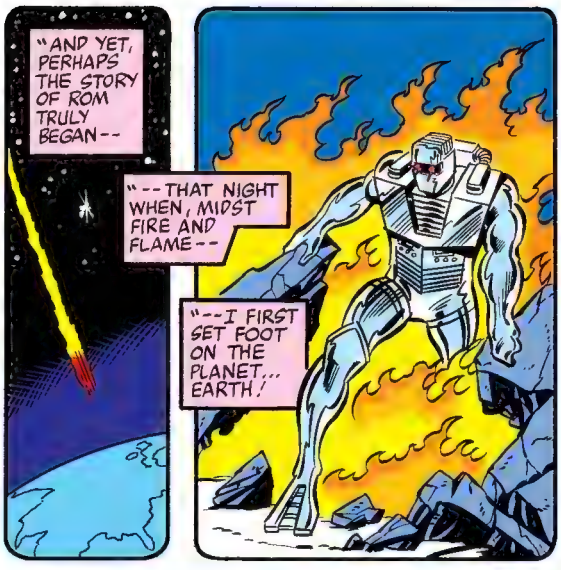
NO PLACE LIKE HOME!

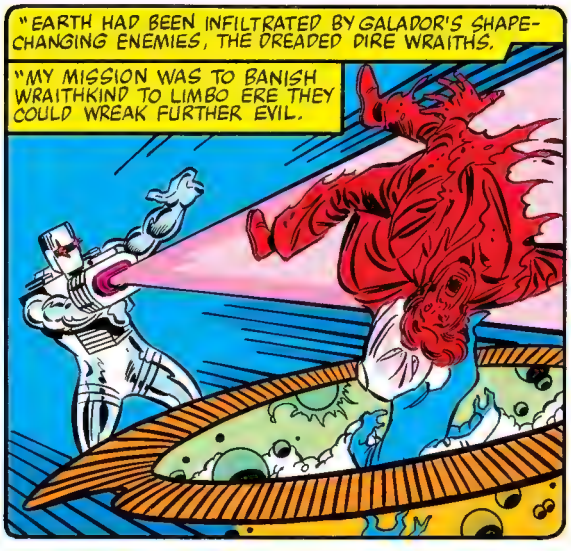

AS THE SKRULL SAUCER EMERGES FROM HYPERSPACE, ROM'S EAGER EYES SCAN THE HEAVENS FOR SOME SIGN OF THE TWIN SUNS OF THE GOLDEN GALAXY ABOUT WHICH ORBITS GALADOR.
ONLY DISTANT STARS BREAK THE BLACK EMPTINESS OF SPACE. HAVE I EMERGED FROM HYPERSPACE TOO SOON?
REED RICHARDS, LEADER OF THE FANTASTIC FOUR, PRESET THE GUIDANCE SYSTEMS OF THE SKRULL SAUCER TO GALADOR'S COORDINATES, WHICH I RETRIEVED FOR HIM FROM MY MEMORY CIRCUITS.
BUT NOW I SEE NO EVIDENCE OF GALADOR --NOR CAN I READ THESE ALIEN SKRULL INSTRUMENTS.
I AM NO SCIENTIST --NO PILOT. I AM A WARRIOR.
THAK
AND I AM LOST IN SPACE!
OR WORSE--AS THE DIRE WRAITHS FORE-TOLD, GALADOR NO LONGER EXISTS.
CYBORG SENSORS REACT TO A SUDDEN MOVE-MENT ON THE SAUCER'S VIEWSCREEN...
...AND THE STALWART SILVER SPACEKNIGHT REALIZES HE IS NO LONGER ALONE IN THE VAST VACUUM OF SPACE.
MOVING AT INCREDIBLE SPEED, THE GLOW CONVERGES ON ROM, RESOLVING ITSELF AT LAST INTO INDIVIDUAL ENTITIES--SKIMMER-MOUNTED SYFON WARRIORS LED BY THEIR CAPTAIN, POWERHOUSE...
...AND BY A BRASH EARTH YOUTH NAMED --NOVA!
A SKRULL SAUCER INVADING XANDARIAN SPACE!
I SEE IT, POWERHOUSE!
OKAY, XANDARIANS! THAT SKRULL SHIP HAS REFUSED TO ACKNOWLEDGE OUR "STAND AND BE SEARCHED" WARNING, SO WE'VE GOTTA ASSUME IT'S HOSTILE! IN OTHER WORDS:
OPEN FIRE!
ONE CAN NOT, OF COURSE, HEAR THE WHINE OF SKIMMER-CANNONS IN SPACE...
2

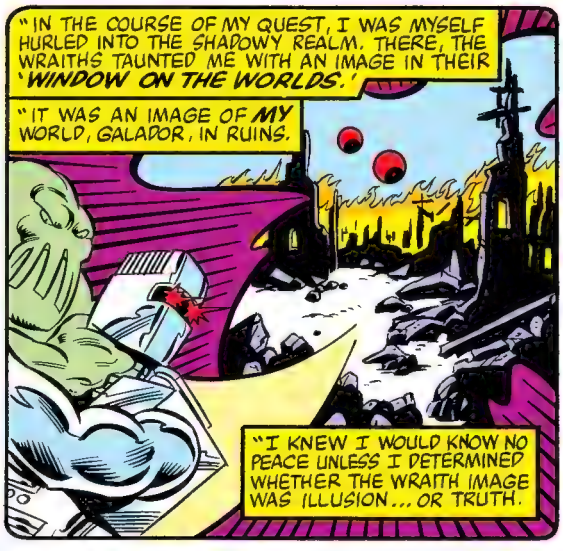

...BUT ROM CAN FEEL THEIR JARRING CONCUSSION BURSTS THROUGH THE HULL OF THE SKRULL SPACECRAFT.
HSSH-HNN HSSH-HNN HSSH-HNN
ACTIVATING HIS RESPIRATOR, WHICH SUPPLIES HIS HUMAN TISSUES WITH OXYGEN IN THE AIRLESS VOID...
...ROM IGNITES HIS ROCKET-PODS AND FLIES FORTH TO MEET HIS ATTACKERS.
AT LEAST THE TRIP THROUGH HYPERSPACE GAVE ME TIME TO REPAIR MY DAMAGED FLIGHT PACK.
I MUST SUMMON MY ENERGY ANALYZER FROM SUBSPACE AND USE IT TO DETERMINE THE NATURE OF THOSE WHO CONFRONT ME.
HOLY--! YOU SEE WHAT'S JUST POPPED OUTTA THAT SKRULL SAUCER, POWERHOUSE? SOME KINDA ROBOT!
OR A SKRULL ITSELF, NOVA! REMEMBER, THE SHAPE-SHIFTERS CAN TAKE ANY FORM THEY CHOOSE!
BEING THE CLOSEST AND BEING IN COMMAND, IT IS ONLY FITTING THAT I DISCOVER WHETHER THIS INTRUDER BE A SKRULL--OR A SKRULL SERVANT!
POWERHOUSE'S LIFE-ENERGIES ARE ANALYZED EVEN AS HE LEAPS FROM HIS SKIMMER.
I HAD THOUGHT MY ATTACKER MIGHT BE A DIRE WRAITH--FOR I FEARED WRAITHKIND'S PRESENCE NEAR MY HOMEWORLD, GALADOR!
BUT THIS BEING IS HUMAN --THOUGH BURSTING WITH INCREDIBLE POWER--
--TO WHICH HE NOW SEEKS TO ADD MINE.
I'LL DRAIN YOU OF EVERY LAST ERG OF ENERGY, SKRULL-CREATURE!
I THINK NOT.
ONCE, NOT LONG AGO, POWERHOUSE HAD BEEN DISPATCHED TO EARTH TO LOCATE XANDAR'S LOST CHAMPION, THE CENTURIAN NOVA PRIME.
POWERHOUSE DEVELOPED AMNESIA, AND, HIS ENERGY-SIPHONING POWERS HAD BEEN TURNED TO CRIME.
3

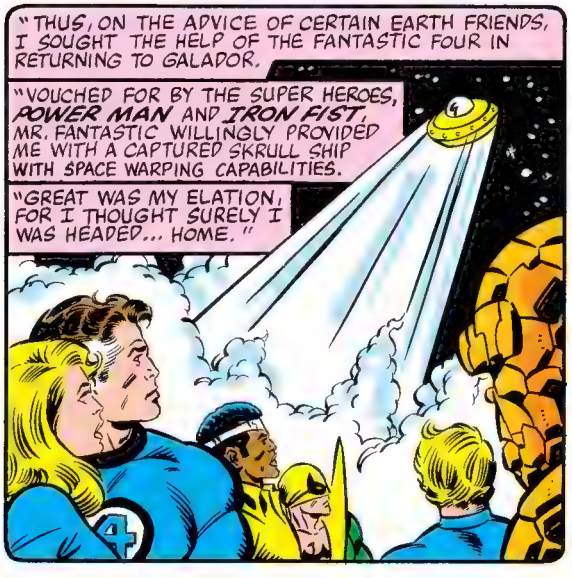

AFTER ENCOUNTERING NOVA PRIME'S SUCCESSOR--THE YOUTHFUL NOVA--POWERHOUSE'S MEMORY RETURNED, AND HE LED NOVA AND THE NEW CHAMPIONS BACK TO XANDAR TO AID HIS WORLD IN RESISTING A SKRULL INVASION.
TODAY, HOWEVER, HIS ENERGY-DRAINING POWERS HAVE MET THEIR MATCH.
DRAINED! DEPLETED! NO ONE HAS EVER DONE THAT TO ME BEFORE!
I MERELY SIPHONED ENOUGH OF MY ATTACKER'S POWER INTO MY ARMOR TO WEAKEN HIM, AND NO MORE.
BUT IT APPEARS THAT MY ACT OF SELF-PRESERVATION HAS ANGERED POWERHOUSE'S YOUTHFUL ALLY.
RING THE SKRULL ROBOT 'ROUND, SYFONS--
--BUT LEAVE THE FIGHTING TO NOVA!
YOUTHFUL, YES--AND HUMAN--BUT POSSESSED OF EVEN MORE PURE POWER THAN THE ENERGY-DRAINING POWERHOUSE.
WHERE ARE YOUR SKRULL MASTERS WHO MADE YOU ROBOT? FROM WHAT UNHOLY CORNER OF SPACE HAVE YOU COME?
NEITHER AM I THE ROBOT YOU THINK ME TO BE, NOR AM I ANY SERVANT TO THE SHAPE-CHANGING SKRULLS. I AM ROM, SPACEKNIGHT--
--AND I HAIL FROM GALADOR AND, MOST RECENTLY, FROM EARTH!
H-HUH?
EARTH? I'M FROM EARTH! HOLD YOUR FIRE, SYFONS--
4

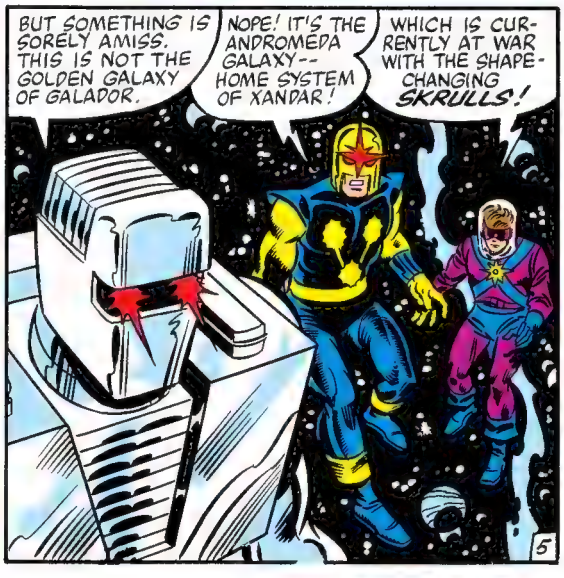

THIS "NON-ROBOT" HAS SOME EXPLAINING TO DO!
PROCEED, SILVER STRANGER, BUT BE WARNED--XANDAR IS IN THE MIDST OF A WAR. WE HAVE NOT THE PATIENCE, OR THE TIME FOR EXTENDED TALES.
MINE IS A STORY WELL WORTH YOUR ATTENTION, POWERHOUSE. IT BEGAN 200 YEARS AGO ON MY HOMEWORLD, GALADOR...

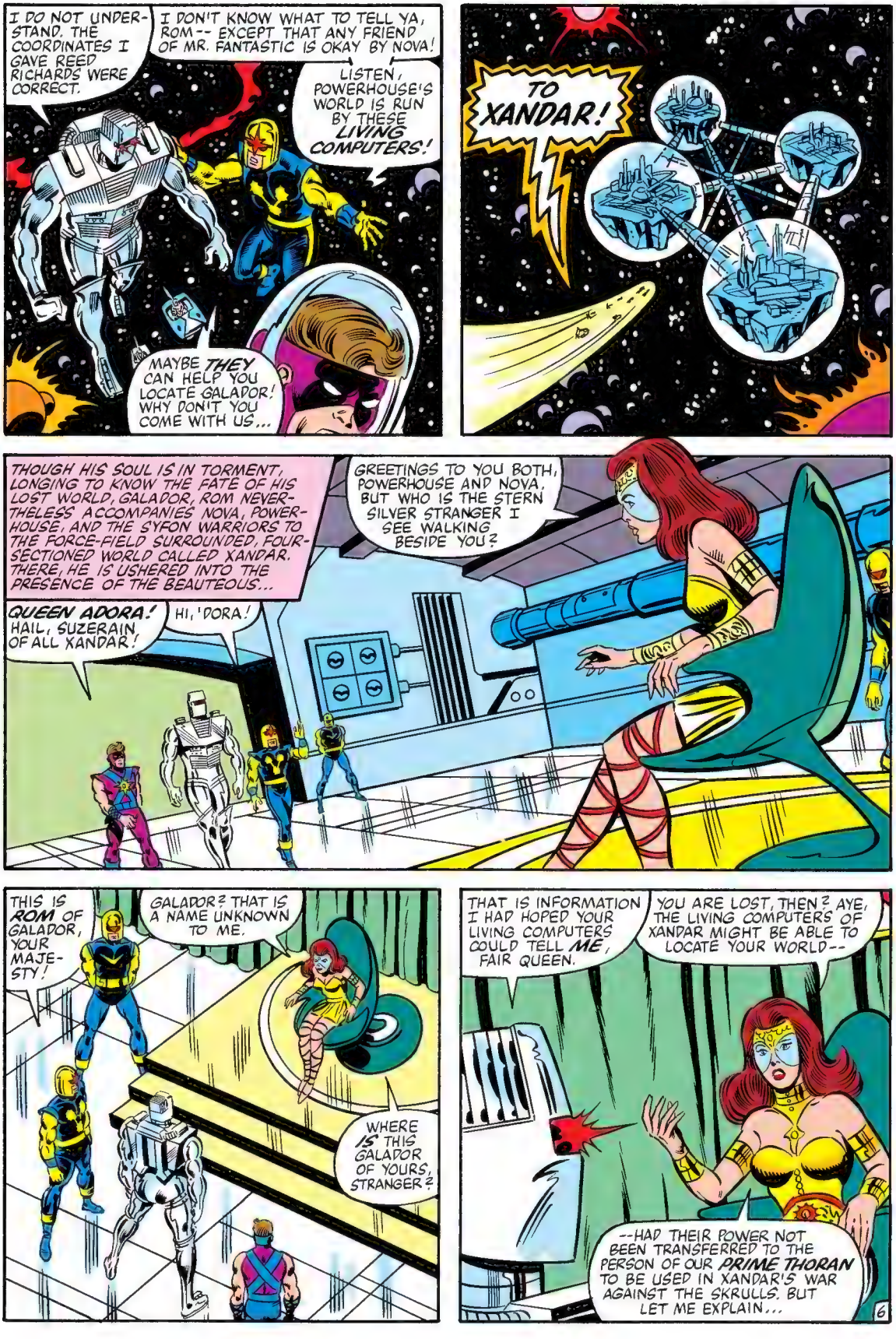

"AND YET, PERHAPS THE STORY OF ROM TRULY BEGAN--
"--THAT NIGHT WHEN, MIDST FIRE AND FLAME--
"--I FIRST SET FOOT ON THE PLANET... EARTH!


"EARTH HAD BEEN INFILTRATED BY GALADOR'S SHAPE-CHANGING ENEMIES, THE DREADED DIRE WRAITHS.
"MY MISSION WAS TO BANISH WRAITHKIND TO LIMBO ERE THEY COULD WREAK FURTHER EVIL.


"IN THE COURSE OF MY QUEST, I WAS MYSELF HURLED INTO THE SHADOWY REALM. THERE, THE WRAITHS TAUNTED ME WITH AN IMAGE IN THEIR 'WINDOW ON THE WORLDS.'
"IT WAS AN IMAGE OF MY WORLD, GALADOR, IN RUINS.
"I KNEW I WOULD KNOW NO PEACE UNLESS I DETERMINED WHETHER THE WRAITH IMAGE WAS ILLUSION... OR TRUTH.


"THUS, ON THE ADVICE OF CERTAIN EARTH FRIENDS, I SOUGHT THE HELP OF THE FANTASTIC FOUR IN RETURNING TO GALADOR.
"VOUCHED FOR BY THE SUPER HEROES, POWER MAN AND IRON FIST, MR. FANTASTIC WILLINGLY PROVIDED ME WITH A CAPTURED SKRULL SHIP WITH SPACE WARPING CAPABILITIES.
"GREAT WAS MY ELATION, FOR I THOUGHT SURELY I WAS HEADED... HOME."


BUT SOMETHING IS SORELY AMISS. THIS IS NOT THE GOLDEN GALAXY OF GALADOR.
NOPE! IT'S THE ANDROMEDA GALAXY--HOME SYSTEM OF XANDAR!
WHICH IS CURRENTLY AT WAR WITH THE SHAPE-CHANGING SKRULLS!
5


I DO NOT UNDERSTAND. THE COORDINATES I GAVE REED RICHARDS WERE CORRECT.
I DON'T KNOW WHAT TO TELL YA, ROM -- EXCEPT THAT ANY FRIEND OF MR. FANTASTIC IS OKAY BY NOVA!
LISTEN, POWERHOUSE'S WORLD IS RUN BY THESE LIVING COMPUTERS!
MAYBE THEY CAN HELP YOU LOCATE GALADOR! WHY DON'T YOU COME WITH US...
TO XANDAR!
THOUGH HIS SOUL IS IN TORMENT, LONGING TO KNOW THE FATE OF HIS LOST WORLD, GALADOR, ROM NEVERTHELESS ACCOMPANIES NOVA, POWERHOUSE, AND THE SYFON WARRIORS TO THE FORCE-FIELD SURROUNDED, FOUR-SECTIONED WORLD CALLED XANDAR. THERE, HE IS USHERED INTO THE PRESENCE OF THE BEAUTEOUS...
GREETINGS TO YOU BOTH, POWERHOUSE AND NOVA. BUT WHO IS THE STERN SILVER STRANGER I SEE WALKING BESIDE YOU?
QUEEN ADORA! HAIL, SUZERAIN OF ALL XANDAR!
HI, 'DORA!
THIS IS ROM OF GALADOR, YOUR MAJESTY!
GALADOR? THAT IS A NAME UNKNOWN TO ME.
WHERE IS THIS GALADOR OF YOURS, STRANGER?
THAT IS INFORMATION I HAD HOPED YOUR LIVING COMPUTERS COULD TELL ME, FAIR QUEEN.
YOU ARE LOST, THEN? AYE, THE LIVING COMPUTERS OF XANDAR MIGHT BE ABLE TO LOCATE YOUR WORLD--
--HAD THEIR POWER NOT BEEN TRANSFERRED TO THE PERSON OF OUR PRIME THORAN TO BE USED IN XANDAR'S WAR AGAINST THE SKRULLS. BUT LET ME EXPLAIN...
6

"XANDAR HAD COME UNDER ATTACK BY THE SAVAGE, SPACE-FARING SKRULLS. I VOYAGED TO EARTH TO SECURE HELP--AND RETURNED WITH THE ***FANTASTIC FOUR***. ALLIED WITH ***NOVA*** AND THE ***NEW CHAMPIONS***--***POWERHOUSE, CRIMEBUSTER, DIAMONDHEAD***, AND THE ***COMET***--THE HEROES FOUGHT NOBLY AGAINST BOTH THE SKRULLS AND THE SINISTER ***SPHINX***.*

*DON'T TAKE OUR WORD FOR IT! GO BACK AND REREAD ***FANTASTIC FOUR*** #204-209--AL.

"MEANWHILE, ***PRIME THORAN***--OUR KEEPER OF THE COMPUTERS--TOOK THE COLLECTIVE INTELLIGENCE OF THE LIVING COMPUTERS UNTO HIMSELF...

"--AND, TRANSFORMED INTO THE ***PROTECTOR***, LED XANDAR'S SUPREME DEFENDERS--THE ***NOVA CORPS***--INTO SPACE IN PURSUIT OF THE SKRULLS."

YEAH, WITH ***PROTECTOR*** AND THE ***NOVA CORPS*** GONE, THAT LEFT ME AND THE ***NEW CHAMPIONS*** TO SAFEGUARD XANDAR AGAINST SKRULL ATTACKS--WHICH SO FAR HAVEN'T COME!

IN THAT WE HAVE BEEN MOST FORTUNATE, NOVA!

I KNOW, POWERHOUSE! BUT IT'S THIS WAITING FOR SOMETHING TO HAPPEN THAT'S DRIVING ME NUTS!

"EVEN THE ***NEW CHAMPIONS*** BUSTED UP! COMET, CRIMEBUSTER, AND DIAMONDHEAD--CHAFING AT THE BIT--PULLED OUT TO FOLLOW THE NOVA CORPS INTO BATTLE!

"WE HAVEN'T HEARD FROM THEM SINCE!"

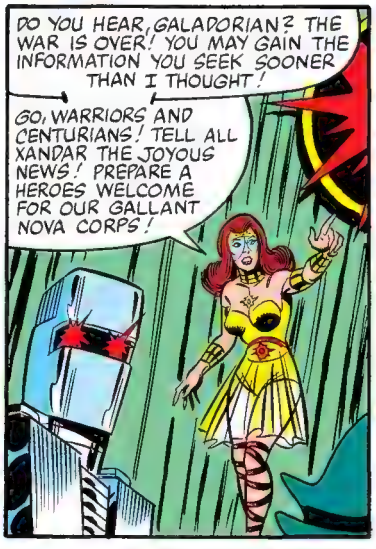
7

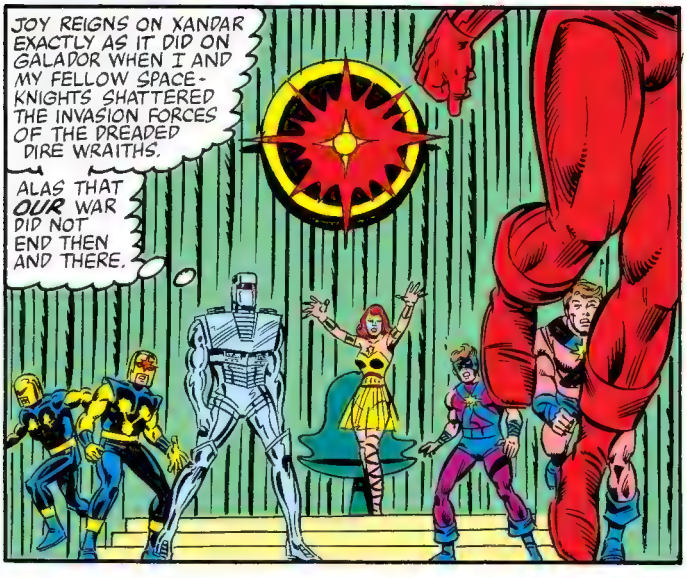
THEY WERE THE LAST CONTACT I'VE HAD WITH ANYONE FROM EARTH! IT'S BEEN MONTHS SINCE I LAST SAW MY HOME PLANET--AND NOW YOU TELL ME EARTH IS IN TROUBLE?
THE DIRE WRAITHS ARE STRONGLY ENTRENCHED THERE, BUT NOT INVINCIBLE.

HEY, LIKE, THAT'S NOT VERY ENCOURAGING NEWS FOR A GUY WHO'S MAYBE A ZILLION MILES AWAY FROM HOME--
--AND HELPLESS TO DO ANYTHING TO SAVE HIS FAMILY AND FRIENDS!

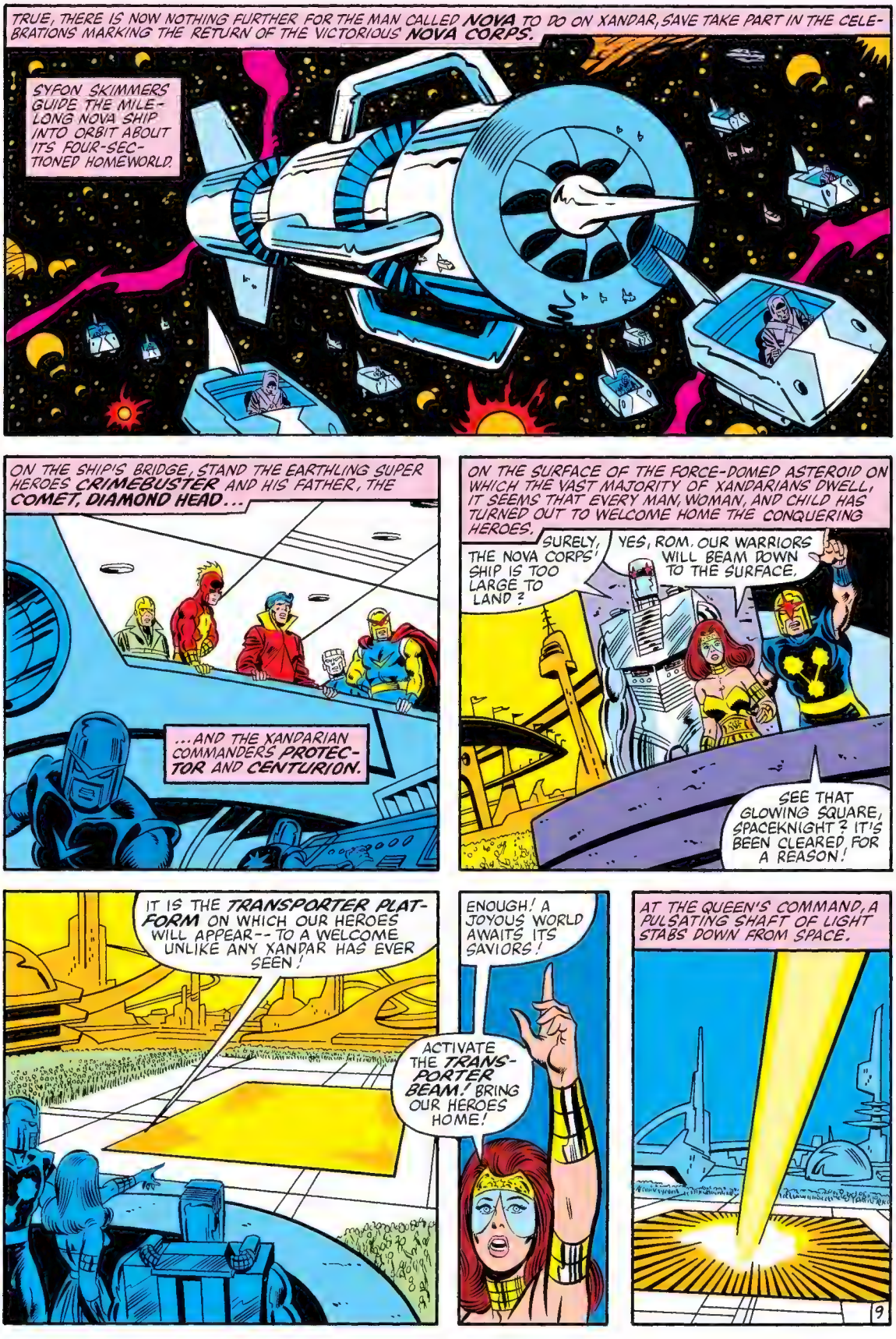
QUEEN ADORA CAN NOT HELP BUT BE MOVED BY YOUNG NOVA'S PLAINT...
ALAS, RICHARD RYDER, EVEN IF YOU RETURN TO THE WORLD OF YOUR BIRTH ALIVE, YOUR NOVA POWERS MUST REMAIN ON XANDAR.

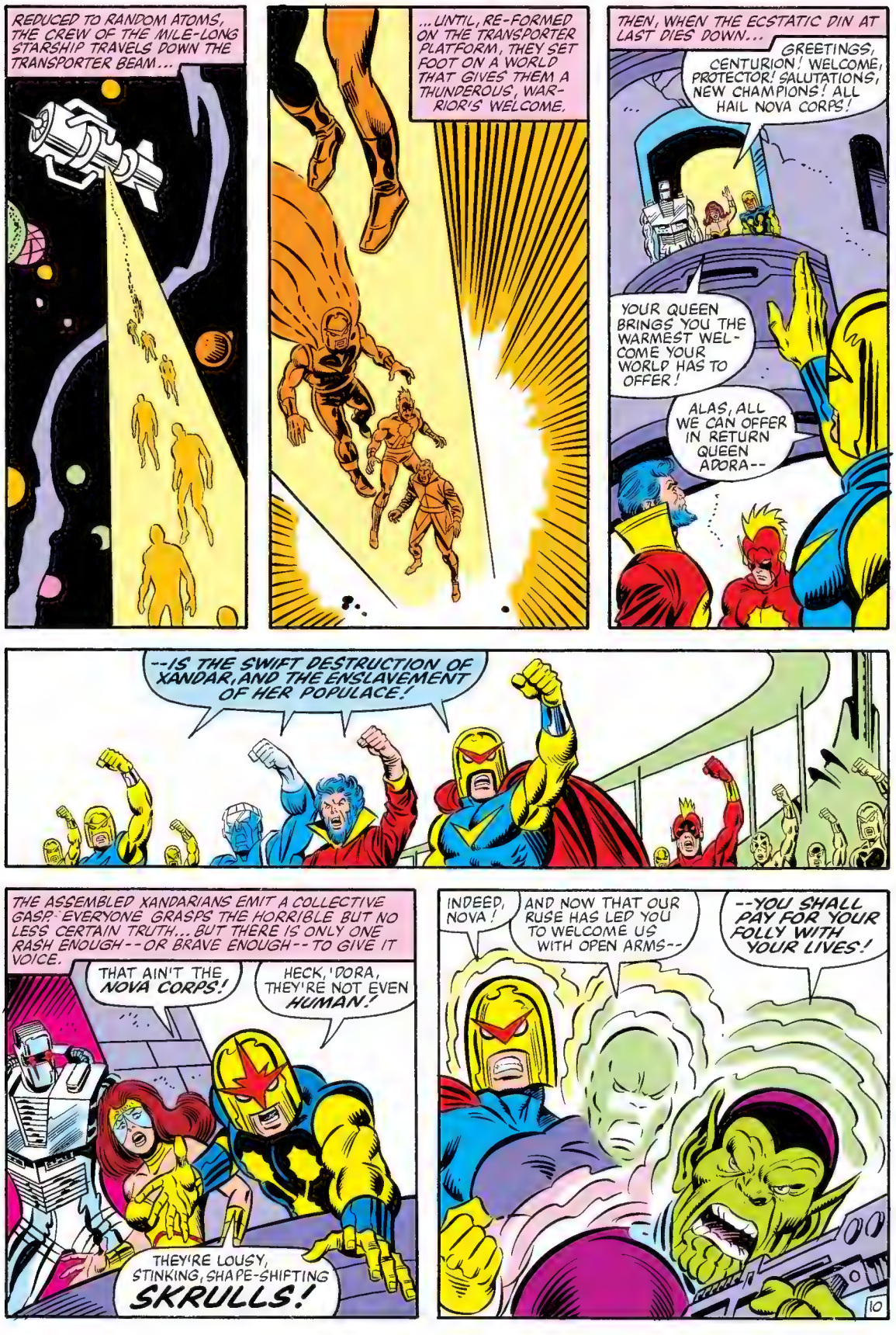
SUDDENLY, A JUBILANT SYFON WARRIOR BURSTS INTO THE IMPERIAL CHAMBER.
SUZERAIN! WONDERFUL NEWS!
THE MILE-LONG SHIP BEARING OUR NOVA CORPS HAS ENTERED THE XANDAR SYSTEM!
THEY ARE RETURNING HOME VICTORIOUS! THE SKRULL INVADERS HAVE BEEN CRUSHED!


DO YOU HEAR, GALADORIAN? THE WAR IS OVER! YOU MAY GAIN THE INFORMATION YOU SEEK SOONER THAN I THOUGHT!
GO, WARRIORS AND CENTURIANS! TELL ALL XANDAR THE JOYOUS NEWS! PREPARE A HEROES WELCOME FOR OUR GALLANT NOVA CORPS!

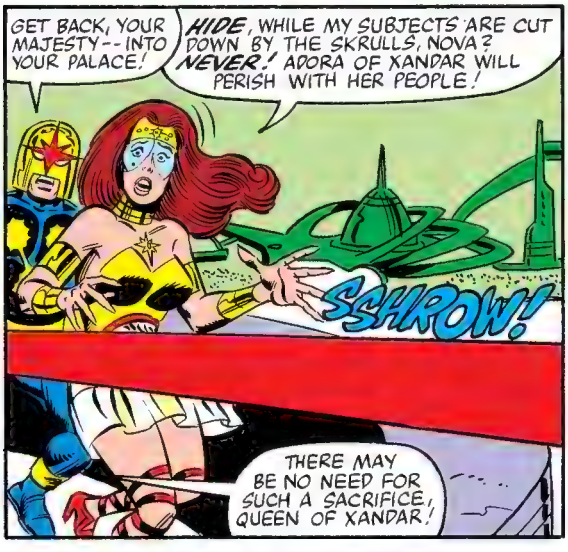

JOY REIGNS ON XANDAR EXACTLY AS IT DID ON GALADOR WHEN I AND MY FELLOW SPACE-KNIGHTS SHATTERED THE INVASION FORCES OF THE DREADED DIRE WRAITHS.
ALAS THAT OUR WAR DID NOT END THEN AND THERE.

AS QUEEN ADORA PREPARES TO MEET THE NOVA CORPS, ROM ACCOMPANIES A HOME-SICK NOVA FROM THE IMPERIAL CHAMBER.
SO THAT'S IT! MONTHS OF STANDING SENTRY DUTY WAITING FOR A SECOND INVASION OF XANDAR THAT NEVER COMES--
--AND THE REAL BATTLE'S WON IN SPACE WITHOUT ME!
BE GLAD, YOUNG ONE. NOW YOU CAN RETURN TO EARTH.

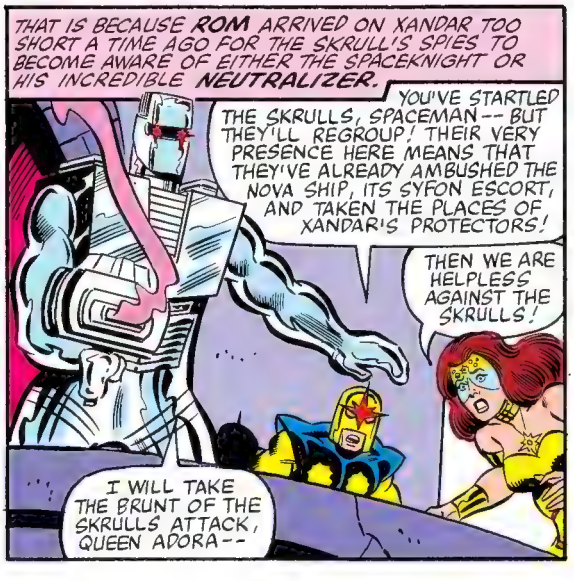

TRUE, THERE IS NOW NOTHING FURTHER FOR THE MAN CALLED NOVA TO DO ON XANDAR, SAVE TAKE PART IN THE CELEBRATIONS MARKING THE RETURN OF THE VICTORIOUS NOVA CORPS.
SYFON SKIMMERS GUIDE THE MILE-LONG NOVA SHIP INTO ORBIT ABOUT ITS FOUR-SECTIONED HOMEWORLD.
ON THE SHIP'S BRIDGE, STAND THE EARTHLING SUPER HEROES CRIMEBUSTER AND HIS FATHER, THE COMET, DIAMOND HEAD...
...AND THE XANDARIAN COMMANDERS PROTECTOR AND CENTURION.
ON THE SURFACE OF THE FORCE-DOMED ASTEROID ON WHICH THE VAST MAJORITY OF XANDARIANS DWELL, IT SEEMS THAT EVERY MAN, WOMAN, AND CHILD HAS TURNED OUT TO WELCOME HOME THE CONQUERING HEROES.
SURELY, THE NOVA CORPS' SHIP IS TOO LARGE TO LAND?
YES, ROM. OUR WARRIORS WILL BEAM DOWN TO THE SURFACE.
SEE THAT GLOWING SQUARE, SPACEKNIGHT? IT'S BEEN CLEARED FOR A REASON!
IT IS THE TRANSPORTER PLATFORM ON WHICH OUR HEROES WILL APPEAR--TO A WELCOME UNLIKE ANY XANDAR HAS EVER SEEN!
ENOUGH! A JOYOUS WORLD AWAITS ITS SAVIORS!
ACTIVATE THE TRANSPORTER BEAM! BRING OUR HEROES HOME!
AT THE QUEEN'S COMMAND, A PULSATING SHAFT OF LIGHT STABS DOWN FROM SPACE.
9

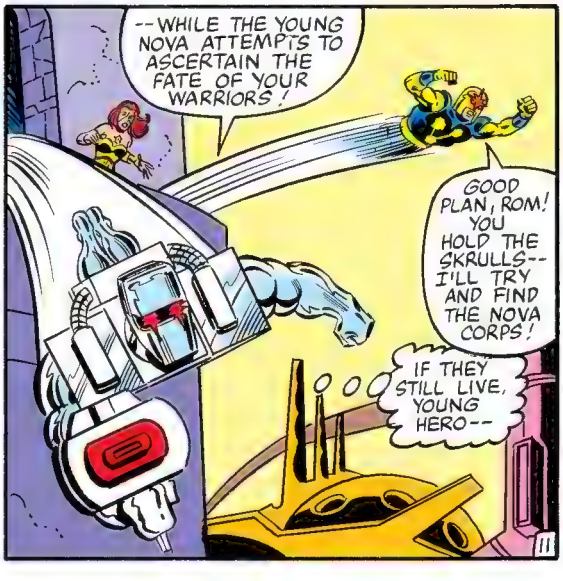

REDUCED TO RANDOM ATOMS, THE CREW OF THE MILE-LONG STARSHIP TRAVELS DOWN THE TRANSPORTER BEAM...
...UNTIL, RE-FORMED ON THE TRANSPORTER PLATFORM, THEY SET FOOT ON A WORLD THAT GIVES THEM A THUNDEROUS, WARRIOR'S WELCOME.
THEN, WHEN THE ECSTATIC DIN AT LAST DIES DOWN...
GREETINGS, CENTURION! WELCOME, PROTECTOR! SALUTATIONS, NEW CHAMPIONS! ALL HAIL NOVA CORPS!
YOUR QUEEN BRINGS YOU THE WARMEST WELCOME YOUR WORLD HAS TO OFFER!
ALAS, ALL WE CAN OFFER IN RETURN QUEEN ADORA--
--IS THE SWIFT DESTRUCTION OF XANDAR, AND THE ENSLAVEMENT OF HER POPULACE!
THE ASSEMBLED XANDARIANS EMIT A COLLECTIVE GASP. EVERYONE GRASPS THE HORRIBLE BUT NO LESS CERTAIN TRUTH... BUT THERE IS ONLY ONE RASH ENOUGH--OR BRAVE ENOUGH--TO GIVE IT VOICE.
THAT AIN'T THE NOVA CORPS!
HECK, 'DORA, THEY'RE NOT EVEN HUMAN!
THEY'RE LOUSY, STINKING, SHAPE-SHIFTING SKRULLS!
INDEED, NOVA!
AND NOW THAT OUR RUSE HAS LED YOU TO WELCOME US WITH OPEN ARMS--
--YOU SHALL PAY FOR YOUR FOLLY WITH YOUR LIVES!
10

THE SKRULL SLAUGHTERERS ARE SWIFT, MERCILESS... AND AS GOOD AS THEIR WORD!
VREET!
VREEOW!
YEEAGGHH!


GET BACK, YOUR MAJESTY--INTO YOUR PALACE!
HIDE, WHILE MY SUBJECTS ARE CUT DOWN BY THE SKRULLS, NOVA? NEVER! ADORA OF XANDAR WILL PERISH WITH HER PEOPLE!
SSHROW!
THERE MAY BE NO NEED FOR SUCH A SACRIFICE, QUEEN OF XANDAR!

SHREEAK!
THE XANDARIANS FIGHT BACK, WITH A WEAPON MIGHTIER THAN OUR OWN!
HOW? OUR INTELLIGENCE REPORTS SAID THAT THEY WERE ALL BUT DEFENSELESS!


THAT IS BECAUSE ROM ARRIVED ON XANDAR TOO SHORT A TIME AGO FOR THE SKRULL'S SPIES TO BECOME AWARE OF EITHER THE SPACEKNIGHT OR HIS INCREDIBLE NEUTRALIZER.
YOU'VE STARTLED THE SKRULLS, SPACEMAN--BUT THEY'LL REGROUP! THEIR VERY PRESENCE HERE MEANS THAT THEY'VE ALREADY AMBUSHED THE NOVA SHIP, ITS SYFON ESCORT, AND TAKEN THE PLACES OF XANDAR'S PROTECTORS!
THEN WE ARE HELPLESS AGAINST THE SKRULLS!
I WILL TAKE THE BRUNT OF THE SKRULLS ATTACK, QUEEN ADORA--

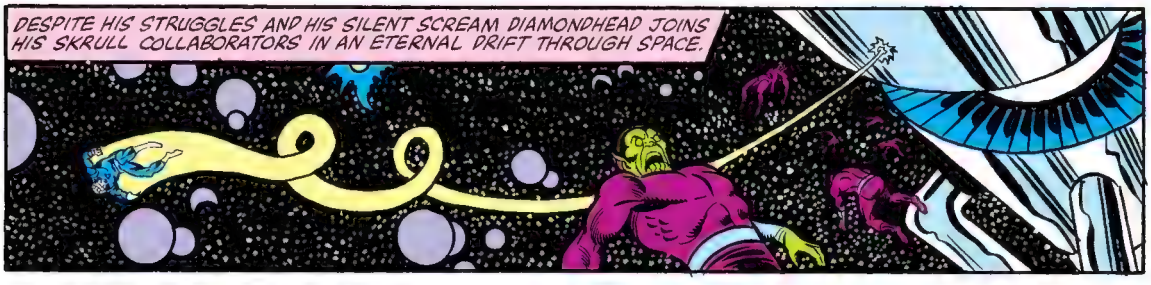

--WHILE THE YOUNG NOVA ATTEMPTS TO ASCERTAIN THE FATE OF YOUR WARRIORS!
GOOD PLAN, ROM! YOU HOLD THE SKRULLS--I'LL TRY AND FIND THE NOVA CORPS!
IF THEY STILL LIVE, YOUNG HERO--

--ON WHICH THIS SPACEKNIGHT WOULD NOT WAGER, FOR THE SKRULLS SEEM EVERY BIT AS CAPABLE OF MURDER AS THE DIRE WRAITHS WHOM THEIR SHAPE-SHIFTING POWERS RESEMBLE.
AN INTERESTING THOUGHT: CAN THERE BE ANY LINK BETWEEN THE SKRULLS AND WRAITHKIND?
QUEEN ADORA OF XANDAR MARVELS AT THE SPEED WITH WHICH THE SILVER SPACEKNIGHT HAS UNNERVED THE SUPREMELY CONFIDENT SKRULL INVADERS.
SHE MARVELS, BUT SHE FEARS AS WELL...
...FOR ROM IS BUT ONE AGAINST AN ENEMY SEEMINGLY AS INNUMERABLE AS THE STARS BEYOND THE FORCE-DOMES OF XANDAR.
THE ALIEN IS FIGHTING FOR US, XANDARIANS!
WILL WE LET HIM FACE THE FOE ALONE?
NO! WE MAY NOT HAVE THE POWER OF OUR NOVA CORPS--
--BUT WE WON'T GIVE UP OUR WORLD WITHOUT A FIGHT!
THUS, THE UNARMED XANDARIAN CITIZENRY BRAVELY ENTERS THE FRAY...
...HURLING THEMSELVES UPON THE INVADERS IN WHAT MAY WELL BE XANDAR'S LAST STAND!
UNLESS, THAT IS, THE SKYWARD-STREAKING NOVA CAN SAVE THE DAY.
EMPTY SKIMMERS AROUND THE NOVA SHIP--ALL THAT'S LEFT OF POWERHOUSE AND HIS SYFON ESCORT!
HOW COULD THE ENTIRE NOVA CORPS GET TAKEN BY THE SKRULLS? IT DOESN'T MAKE SENSE!
12

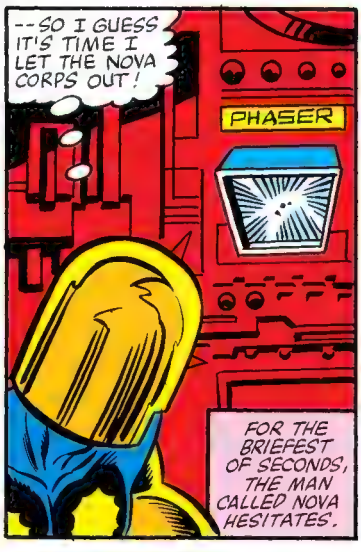
YEEOW! DEATH RAY! SOMEONE'S STILL ABOARD THE NOVA SHIP, AND THEY PLAY FOR KEEPS!
THEN, THROUGH THE MAIN VIEWPORT, NOVA SEES HIS ENEMY...
...AND CURSES HIMSELF FOR NOT HAVING SUSPECTED IN THE FIRST PLACE.
DIAMONDHEAD! YOU HAD US SPARE THE NOVA CORPS-- WHAT WOULD YOU DO WITH THIS STRIPLING?
NOVA? SET YOUR CAPTURED WEAPONS AT THEIR MOST LETHAL, SKRULL--
--AND FRY THE LITTLE SONNUVVA...
I CAN SEE DIAMONDHEAD'S LIPS MOVING, BUT I DON'T NEED TO HEAR WHAT HE'S SAYING! THAT CRYSTALLINE CREEP'S TURNED TRAITOR!
HE SOLD OUT THE NOVA CORPS AND THE NEW CHAMPIONS AND HANDED THEM OVER TO THE SKRULLS!
CEASE FIRING! DIVERT ALL POWER TO THE SHIP'S FORCE-SHIELDS!
THAT YOUNG IDIOT'S GONNA RAM US!
HOW LONG AGO WAS IT THAT A DYING ALIEN SOUGHT OUT RICHARD RYDER AND PASSED ON TO HIM THE POWERS OF A XANDARIAN CENTURION?
NOT LONG, AS THE UNIVERSE TELLS TIME, BUT LONG ENOUGH FOR THIS ASTONISHED EARTH YOUTH TO UNDERSTAND THAT WITH GREAT POWER COMES GREAT RESPONSIBILITY...
...AND TO COME TO GRIPS WITH HIS MISSION AS A NOVA PRIME!
13

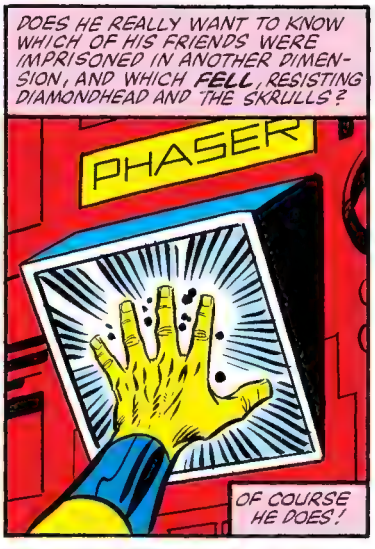
THE NOVA SHIP RENT FROM STEM TO STERN, ITS SKRULL CREW GASPS DESPERATELY FOR BREATH--STRUGGLING TO CHANGE TO SOME FORM ABLE TO EXIST WITHOUT OXYGEN.
AS FOR THE TRAITOR, DIAMONDHEAD, THE ACCIDENT THAT MADE HIM A CRYSTALLINE CREATURE IN THE FIRST PLACE, REMOVED HIM FOR ALL TIME FROM THE NECESSITY OF BREATHING.
BLASTED PUNK TOTALLED MY SKRULL CREW--
--AN' NOW HE'S COMIN' AFTER ME!
BUT I KEPT ME SOME HOSTAGES FOR JUST SUCH AN OCCASION--
--SAFELY SEALED AWAY WHERE I COULD GET TO 'EM IF I NEEDED 'EM!
SO NOW ALL I GOTTA DO IS TELL NOVA TA LET ME GO, OR THEY'LL BUY THE FARM--
SPOW!
--AFTER WHICH I'LL PULL THE PLUG AN' SKRAG 'EM ANY WAAAYYY!
NOVA!
I KNOW YOU CAN'T HEAR ME, DIAMONDHEAD --THERE'S NO AIR LEFT AFTER I PUNCHED THROUGH YOUR TRANSPORTATION--AND SOUND CAN'T TRAVEL IN A VACUUM...
...BUT THE LOOK IN MY EYES SHOULD TELL YOU WHAT IT IS I'M GOING TO DO WITH YOU UNLESS YOU CLUE ME IN TO WHAT HAPPENED TO THE NOVA CORPS--AND FAST!
THE KID'S OUT FOR BLOOD! I'VE NEVER SEEN HIM MADDER! I GOTTA BUY TIME TO MAKE MY GETAWAY--
--AN' BUY TIME I WILL ...WITH HIS BUDDIES' LIVES!
DIAMONDHEAD'S TRYING TO MANEUVER AROUND ME--TO GET PAST ME! WHY? WHAT'S HE UP TO?
WAITAMINNIT! OF COURSE!
NOW I KNOW WHAT HE'S DONE WITH THE NOVA CORPS!
14

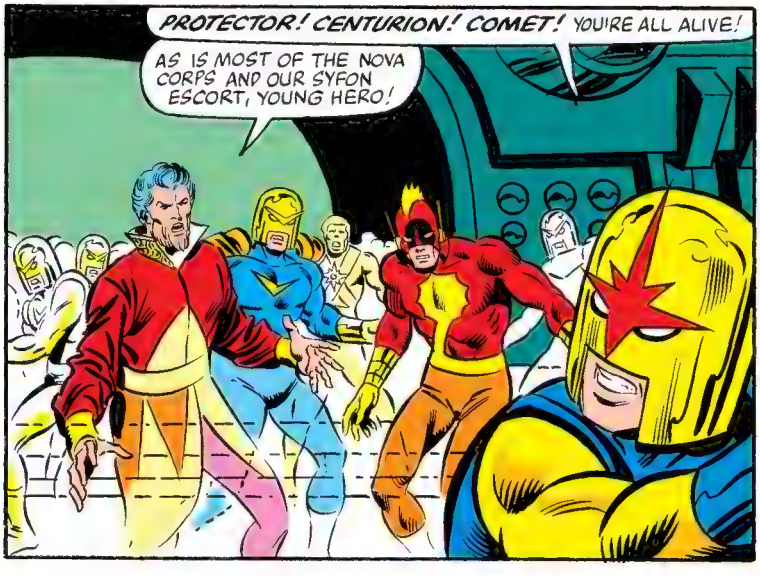
THE SCUM! HE KNEW THAT ALL NOVA SHIPS ARE EQUIPPED WITH A DIMENSIONAL PHASER...
...A KIND OF SUPER-SCIENTIFIC LIFE-PRESERVER THAT ALLOWS CREWS OF DISTRESSED SPACE-SHIPS TO PHASE TO SAFETY IN ANOTHER DIMENSION!
DIAMONDHEAD MUST HAVE SUCKERED THE NOVA CORPS INTO THE PHASER--THEN ALLOWED THE SHIP TO BE TAKEN OVER BY THE SKRULLS!


DESPITE HIS STRUGGLES AND HIS SILENT SCREAM DIAMONDHEAD JOINS HIS SKRULL COLLABORATORS IN AN ETERNAL DRIFT THROUGH SPACE.

PHEW! SUDDENLY IT SEEMS A LOT CLEANER IN HERE!
SERVO-DRONES ARE ALREADY AT WORK REPAIRING THE HOLE I PUNCHED IN THE NOVA SHIP'S HULL--

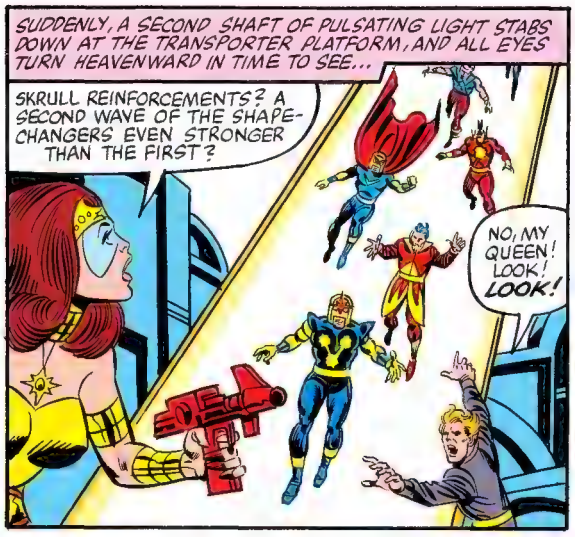

--SO I GUESS IT'S TIME I LET THE NOVA CORPS OUT!
PHASER
FOR THE BRIEFEST OF SECONDS, THE MAN CALLED NOVA HESITATES.


DOES HE REALLY WANT TO KNOW WHICH OF HIS FRIENDS WERE IMPRISONED IN ANOTHER DIMENSION, AND WHICH FELL, RESISTING DIAMONDHEAD AND THE SKRULLS?
PHASER
OF COURSE HE DOES!


PROTECTOR! CENTURION! COMET! YOU'RE ALL ALIVE!
AS IS MOST OF THE NOVA CORPS AND OUR SYFON ESCORT, YOUNG HERO!

BUT THERE WERE LOSSES--TERRIBLE LOSSES--JUST THE SAME.
15

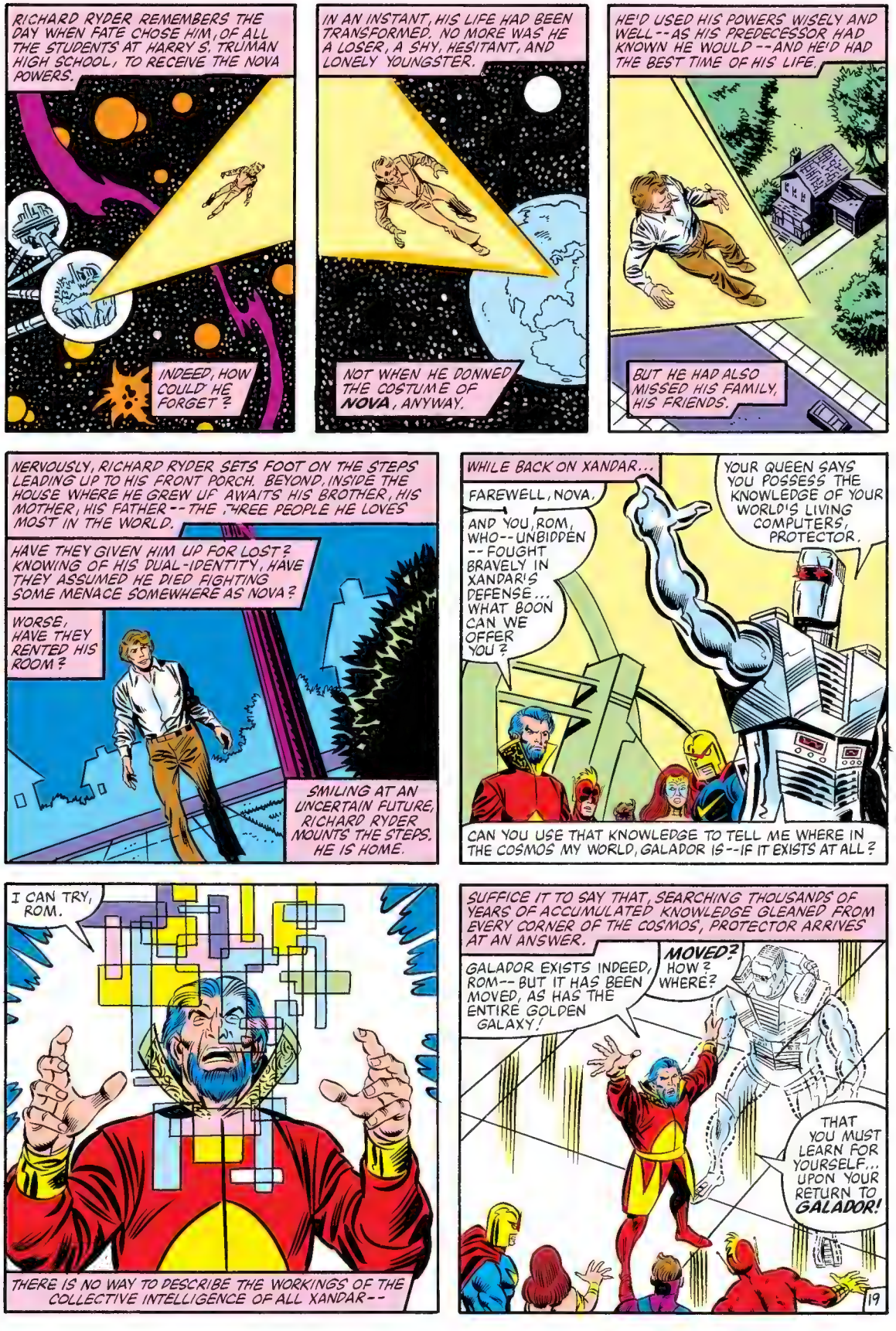
AMONG THEM, YOUR FELLOW EARTHLING-- CRIME-BUSTER!
WHAT HAPPENED, COMET?
THE NOVA SHIP ANSWERED A DISTRESS CALL THEY THOUGHT WAS TRANSMITTED BY OUR SMALLER CRAFT!
"BUT DIAMONDHEAD HAD ALREADY BETRAYED THE NEW CHAMPIONS! HE HAD ALLOWED THE SKRULLS TO SEIZE OUR CRAFT, AND THEN TO TRANSMIT THE SIGNAL THAT WOULD DRAW THE NOVA CORPS INTO THEIR TRAP!
"CRIMEBUSTER DISCOVERED THEM, AND WAS SLAIN BEFORE HE COULD WARN THE REST OF US!
"I TRIED TO AVENGE MY SON, BUT WAS PHASED INTO THAT OTHER DIMENSION ALONG WITH THE AMBUSHED NOVA CORPS!"
I-I'M SORRY, COMET! I KNOW IT WON'T BRING CRIMEBUSTER BACK, BUT I'VE MADE DIAMONDHEAD PAY FOR HIS TREACHERY!
NOW WE'VE ALL GOTTA GET DOWN TO XANDAR WHERE THE ONLY THING STANDING BETWEEN THAT WORLD AND SKRULL ENSLAVEMENT IS--
--A SPACE-KNIGHT CALLED ROM!
AT THAT MOMENT, BENEATH XANDAR'S IMPERIAL DOME...
GLEEARGHH!
BACK, SKRULL!
THOUGH YOU COME CRASHING AT ME LIKE WAVES UPON A REEF, STILL SHALL ROM STAND HIS GROUND!
AND, AS LONG AS WE ARE ABLE, THE PEOPLE OF XANDAR WILL STAND BESIDE YOU, SPACE-KNIGHT!
AIIEEE!
16

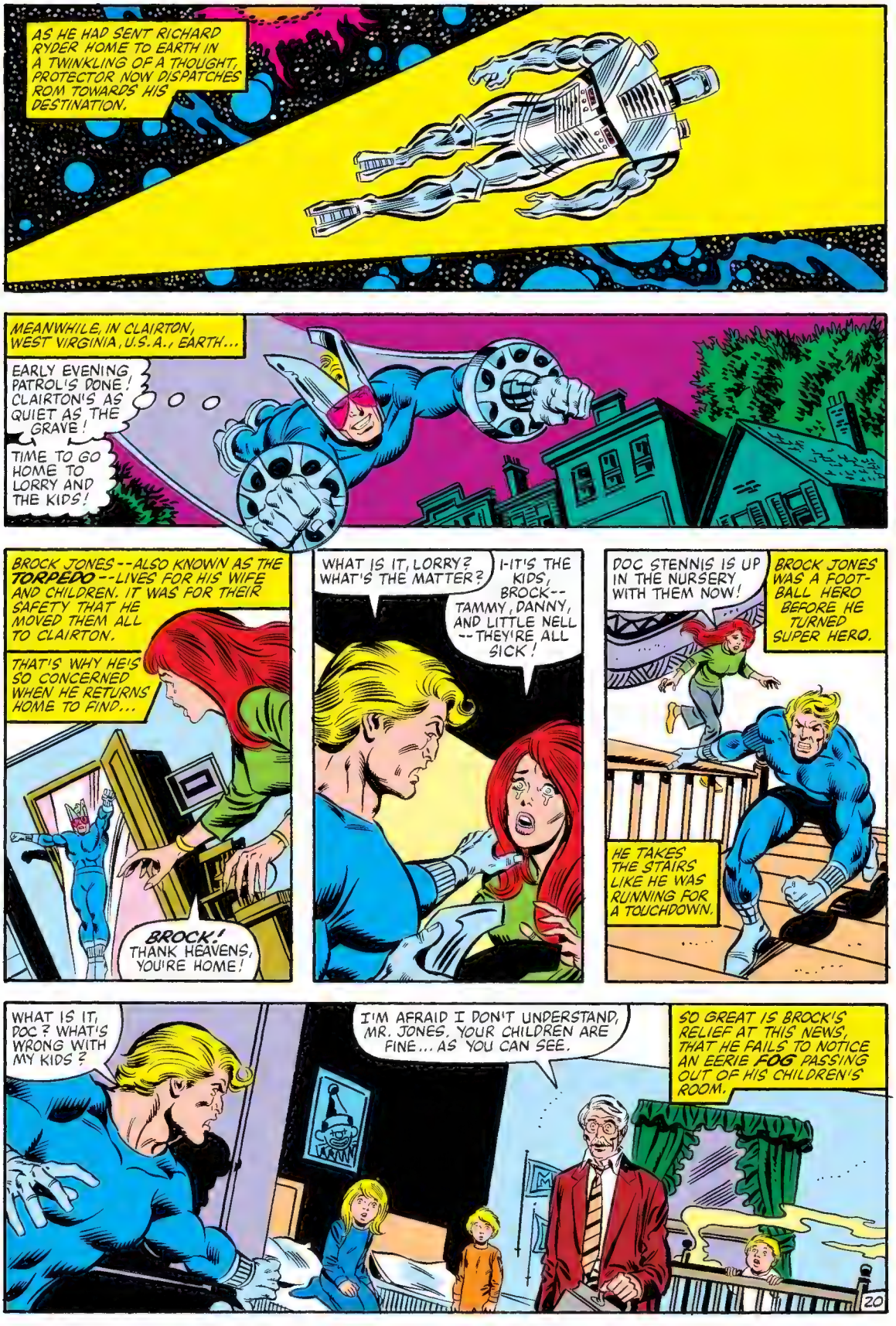

SUDDENLY, A SECOND SHAFT OF PULSATING LIGHT STABS DOWN AT THE TRANSPORTER PLATFORM, AND ALL EYES TURN HEAVENWARD IN TIME TO SEE...
SKRULL REINFORCEMENTS? A SECOND WAVE OF THE SHAPE-CHANGERS EVEN STRONGER THAN THE FIRST?
NO, MY QUEEN! LOOK! LOOK!

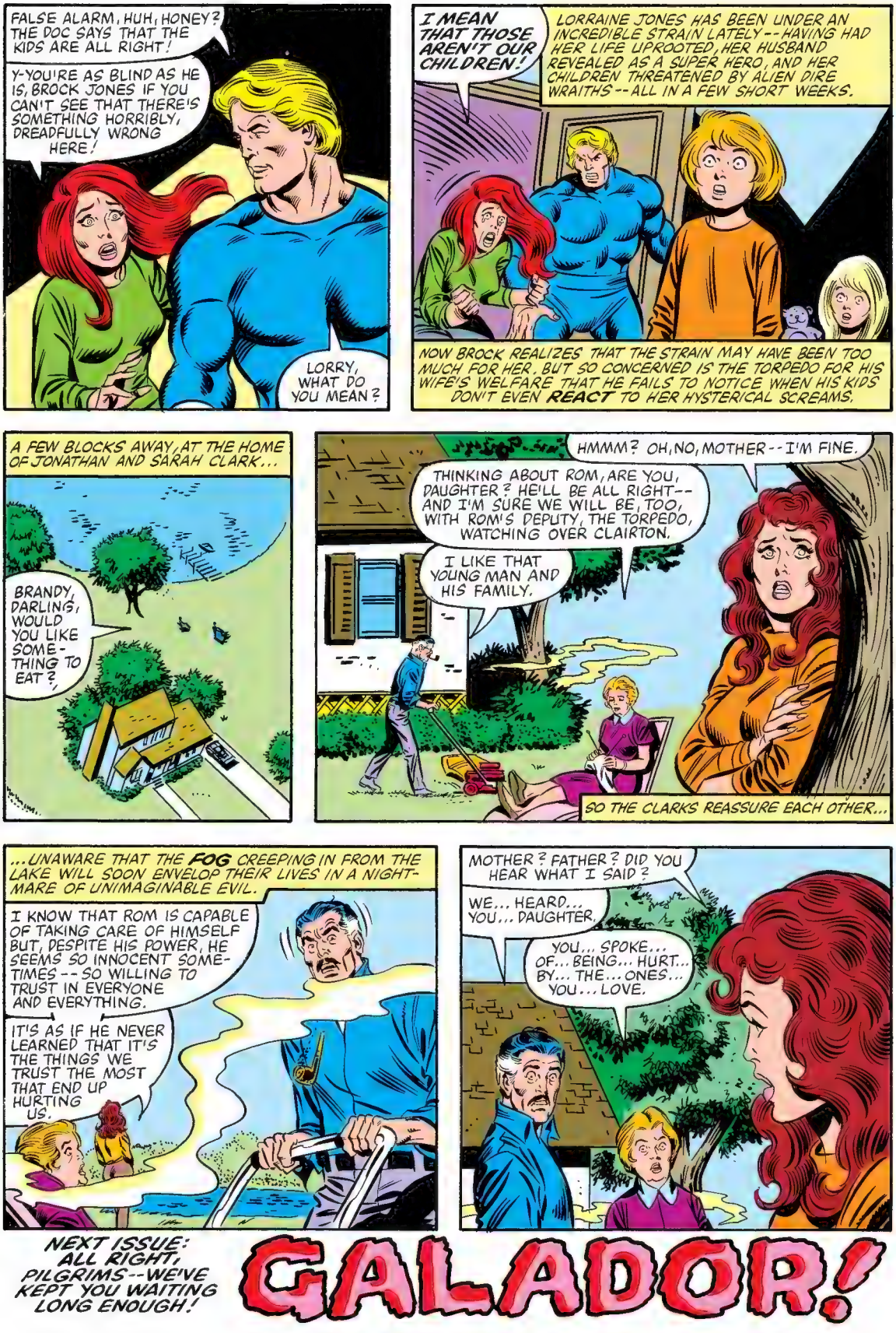
'TIS THE NOVA CORPS AT LAST!
LET'S GO, GUYS!
FOR XANDAR!
FOR MY SON!

IN FUTURE TIMES, IT WILL BE THE POETS WHO SING THE SONGS AND WEAVE THE LEGENDS CHRONICLING XANDAR'S DELIVERANCE FROM THE SAVAGERY OF THE SKRULLS! CHILDREN WILL LISTEN IN WIDE-EYED WONDER, AND WILL LAY THEIR HEADS DOWN UPON THEIR PILLOWS TO WELCOME DREAMS RIFE WITH HEROES--WARRIORS OF THREE WORLDS, XANDAR, GALADOR, AND EARTH--WHO FOUGHT SIDE-BY-SIDE TO REPEL THE INVADERS AND WHO, WHEN ALL WAS SAID AND DONE, DID THEIR DUTY WELL!
17

WHADDAYA KNOW? WE WON!
AYE, STRIPLING! AND THIS DAY YOU HAVE TRULY EARNED THE RANK OF NOVA PRIME!
GO, SKRULLS! OUR SYFON WARRIORS WILL ESCORT YOU FROM XANDARIAN SPACE! TELL YOUR EMPRESS OF YOUR DEFEAT... IF YOU DARE!
YOU LET THEM LIVE? ARE YOU NOT AFRAID THEY WILL RETURN?
YOU DO NOT KNOW THE SKRULLS, ROM! THE BEST THEY HAVE TO LOOK FORWARD TO, UPON RETURNING HOME DEFEATED... IS DEATH!
THEN THE STILL-STUNNED SKRULLS ARE KICKED IGNOMINIOUSLY OFF XANDAR.
ADORA! I NEVER THOUGHT TO TAKE YOU IN MY ARMS AGAIN!
THERE WILL BE TIME ENOUGH TO HOLD ME NOW, BELOVED CENTURION!
AT LAST, XANDAR IS AT PEACE!
YES, XANDAR HAS THE PEACE FOR WHICH IT HAS LONGED, LO, THESE MANY MONTHS -- BUT HOW CAN WE REPAY YOU WARRIORS, WHO MADE OUR CAUSE YOUR OWN?
MY SON, CRIMEBUSTER, DIED DEFENDING XANDAR, PROTECTOR. I-I THINK I'D LIKE TO STAY HERE TO KEEP HIS MEMORY ALIVE
YOU MEAN NOT RETURN TO EARTH, COMET?
GEE, THAT'S WHAT I WANT MORE THAN ANYTHING... TO GET BACK HOME AND USE MY NOVA POWERS AGAINST THE DIRE WRAITHS!
I AM AFRAID THAT CANNOT BE, NOVA! YOUR POWERS MUST REMAIN HERE ON XANDAR, WHERE THEY ORIGINATED.
HUH? BUT I EARNED 'EM! CENTURION SAID SO!
WHAT GOOD AM I GONNA BE TO EARTH WITHOUT 'EM?
ORDINARY EARTHLINGS MUST FIND WAYS TO COMBAT THE WRAITHS, NOVA!
WHEN YOU GET HOME, LOOK UP BRANDY CLARK IN CLAIRTON, WEST VIRGINIA!
TELL HER THAT ROM -- SPACE-KNIGHT -- SENT YOU!
AND NOW, RICHARD RYDER--
HEY, I-I'M FADING!
RETURN TO YOUR WORLD, WITH THE ETERNAL THANKS OF XANDAR!
18


RICHARD RYDER REMEMBERS THE DAY WHEN FATE CHOSE HIM, OF ALL THE STUDENTS AT HARRY S. TRUMAN HIGH SCHOOL, TO RECEIVE THE NOVA POWERS.
INDEED, HOW COULD HE FORGET?
IN AN INSTANT, HIS LIFE HAD BEEN TRANSFORMED. NO MORE WAS HE A LOSER, A SHY, HESITANT, AND LONELY YOUNGSTER.
NOT WHEN HE DONNED THE COSTUME OF NOVA, ANYWAY.
HE'D USED HIS POWERS WISELY AND WELL--AS HIS PREDECESSOR HAD KNOWN HE WOULD--AND HE'D HAD THE BEST TIME OF HIS LIFE.
BUT HE HAD ALSO MISSED HIS FAMILY, HIS FRIENDS.
NERVOUSLY, RICHARD RYDER SETS FOOT ON THE STEPS LEADING UP TO HIS FRONT PORCH. BEYOND, INSIDE THE HOUSE WHERE HE GREW UP, AWAITS HIS BROTHER, HIS MOTHER, HIS FATHER--THE THREE PEOPLE HE LOVES MOST IN THE WORLD.
HAVE THEY GIVEN HIM UP FOR LOST? KNOWING OF HIS DUAL-IDENTITY, HAVE THEY ASSUMED HE DIED FIGHTING SOME MENACE SOMEWHERE AS NOVA?
WORSE, HAVE THEY RENTED HIS ROOM?
SMILING AT AN UNCERTAIN FUTURE, RICHARD RYDER MOUNTS THE STEPS. HE IS HOME.
WHILE BACK ON XANDAR...
FAREWELL, NOVA.
AND YOU, ROM, WHO--UNBIDDEN--FOUGHT BRAVELY IN XANDAR'S DEFENSE... WHAT BOON CAN WE OFFER YOU?
YOUR QUEEN SAYS YOU POSSESS THE KNOWLEDGE OF YOUR WORLD'S LIVING COMPUTERS, PROTECTOR.
CAN YOU USE THAT KNOWLEDGE TO TELL ME WHERE IN THE COSMOS MY WORLD, GALADOR IS--IF IT EXISTS AT ALL?
I CAN TRY, ROM.
THERE IS NO WAY TO DESCRIBE THE WORKINGS OF THE COLLECTIVE INTELLIGENCE OF ALL XANDAR--
SUFFICE IT TO SAY THAT, SEARCHING THOUSANDS OF YEARS OF ACCUMULATED KNOWLEDGE GLEANED FROM EVERY CORNER OF THE COSMOS, PROTECTOR ARRIVES AT AN ANSWER.
GALADOR EXISTS INDEED, ROM--BUT IT HAS BEEN MOVED, AS HAS THE ENTIRE GOLDEN GALAXY!
MOVED? HOW? WHERE?
THAT YOU MUST LEARN FOR YOURSELF... UPON YOUR RETURN TO GALADOR!
19


AS HE HAD SENT RICHARD RYDER HOME TO EARTH IN A TWINKLING OF A THOUGHT, PROTECTOR NOW DISPATCHES ROM TOWARDS HIS DESTINATION.
MEANWHILE, IN CLAIRTON, WEST VIRGINIA, U.S.A., EARTH...
EARLY EVENING PATROL'S DONE! CLAIRTON'S AS QUIET AS THE GRAVE!
TIME TO GO HOME TO LORRY AND THE KIDS!
BROCK JONES--ALSO KNOWN AS THE TORPEDO--LIVES FOR HIS WIFE AND CHILDREN. IT WAS FOR THEIR SAFETY THAT HE MOVED THEM ALL TO CLAIRTON.
THAT'S WHY HE'S SO CONCERNED WHEN HE RETURNS HOME TO FIND...
BROCK! THANK HEAVENS, YOU'RE HOME!
WHAT IS IT, LORRY? WHAT'S THE MATTER?
I-IT'S THE KIDS, BROCK-- TAMMY, DANNY, AND LITTLE NELL --THEY'RE ALL SICK!
DOC STENNIS IS UP IN THE NURSERY WITH THEM NOW!
BROCK JONES WAS A FOOT-BALL HERO BEFORE HE TURNED SUPER HERO.
HE TAKES THE STAIRS LIKE HE WAS RUNNING FOR A TOUCHDOWN.
WHAT IS IT, DOC? WHAT'S WRONG WITH MY KIDS?
I'M AFRAID I DON'T UNDERSTAND, MR. JONES. YOUR CHILDREN ARE FINE... AS YOU CAN SEE.
SO GREAT IS BROCK'S RELIEF AT THIS NEWS, THAT HE FAILS TO NOTICE AN EERIE FOG PASSING OUT OF HIS CHILDREN'S ROOM.
20


FALSE ALARM, HUH, HONEY? THE DOC SAYS THAT THE KIDS ARE ALL RIGHT!
Y-YOU'RE AS BLIND AS HE IS, BROCK JONES IF YOU CAN'T SEE THAT THERE'S SOMETHING HORRIBLY, DREADFULLY WRONG HERE!
LORRY, WHAT DO YOU MEAN?
I MEAN THAT THOSE AREN'T OUR CHILDREN!
LORRAINE JONES HAS BEEN UNDER AN INCREDIBLE STRAIN LATELY--HAVING HAD HER LIFE UPROOTED, HER HUSBAND REVEALED AS A SUPER HERO, AND HER CHILDREN THREATENED BY ALIEN DIRE WRAITHS--ALL IN A FEW SHORT WEEKS.
NOW BROCK REALIZES THAT THE STRAIN MAY HAVE BEEN TOO MUCH FOR HER. BUT SO CONCERNED IS THE TORPEDO FOR HIS WIFE'S WELFARE THAT HE FAILS TO NOTICE WHEN HIS KIDS DON'T EVEN REACT TO HER HYSTERICAL SCREAMS.
A FEW BLOCKS AWAY, AT THE HOME OF JONATHAN AND SARAH CLARK...
BRANDY, DARLING, WOULD YOU LIKE SOMETHING TO EAT?
HMMM? OH, NO, MOTHER--I'M FINE.
THINKING ABOUT ROM, ARE YOU, DAUGHTER? HE'LL BE ALL RIGHT--AND I'M SURE WE WILL BE, TOO, WITH ROM'S DEPUTY, THE TORPEDO, WATCHING OVER CLAIRTON.
I LIKE THAT YOUNG MAN AND HIS FAMILY.
SO THE CLARKS REASSURE EACH OTHER...
...UNAWARE THAT THE FOG CREEPING IN FROM THE LAKE WILL SOON ENVELOP THEIR LIVES IN A NIGHTMARE OF UNIMAGINABLE EVIL.
I KNOW THAT ROM IS CAPABLE OF TAKING CARE OF HIMSELF BUT, DESPITE HIS POWER, HE SEEMS SO INNOCENT SOMETIMES--SO WILLING TO TRUST IN EVERYONE AND EVERYTHING.
IT'S AS IF HE NEVER LEARNED THAT IT'S THE THINGS WE TRUST THE MOST THAT END UP HURTING US.
MOTHER? FATHER? DID YOU HEAR WHAT I SAID?
WE... HEARD... YOU... DAUGHTER.
YOU... SPOKE... OF... BEING... HURT... BY... THE... ONES... YOU... LOVE.
NEXT ISSUE: ALL RIGHT, PILGRIMS--WE'VE KEPT YOU WAITING LONG ENOUGH!
GALADOR!

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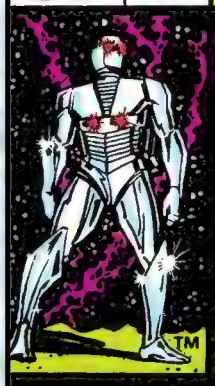
BEGINNING SEPT. 12th ON NBC

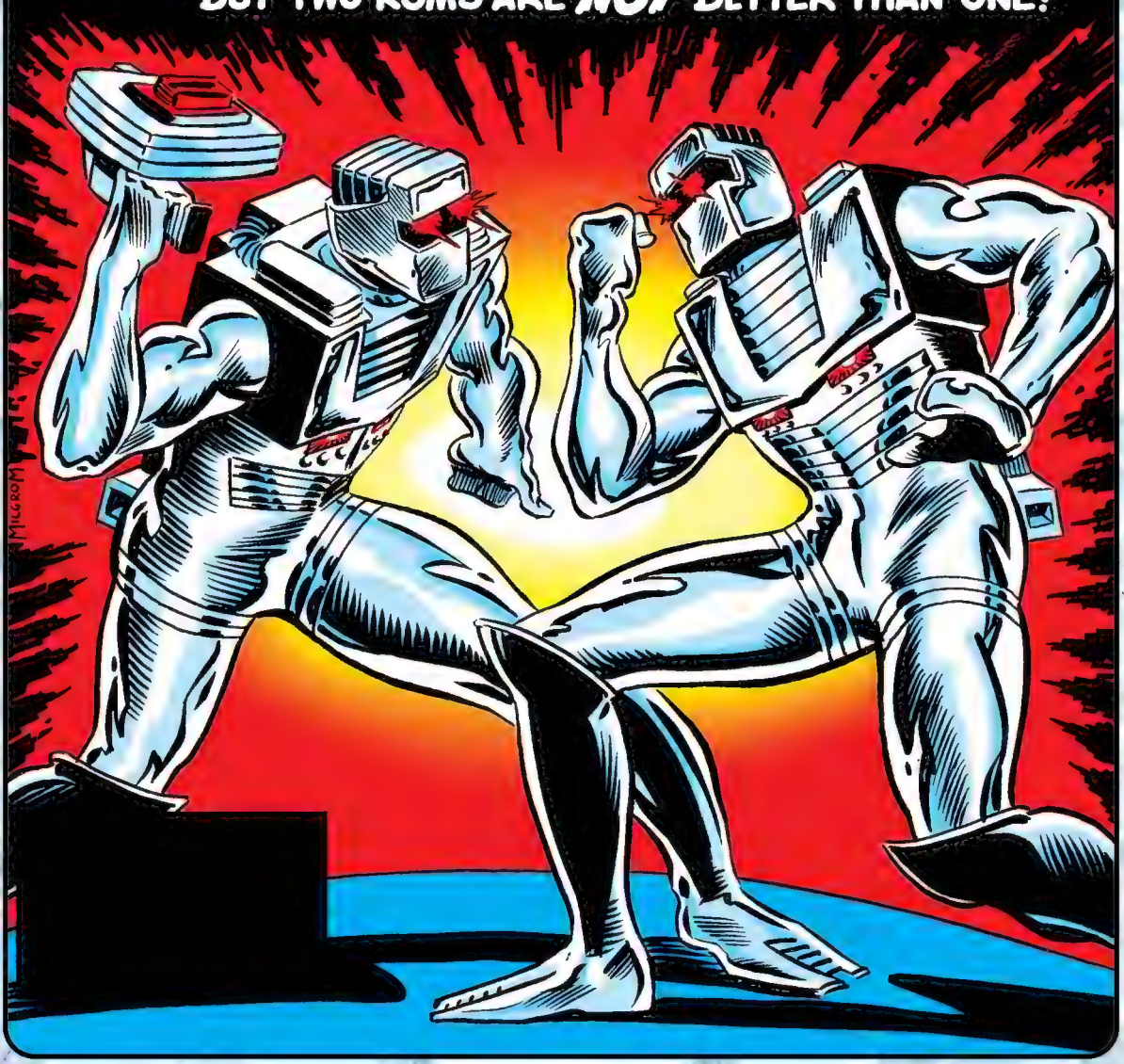
SPIDER-MAN AND HIS AMAZING FRIENDS!



ROM™

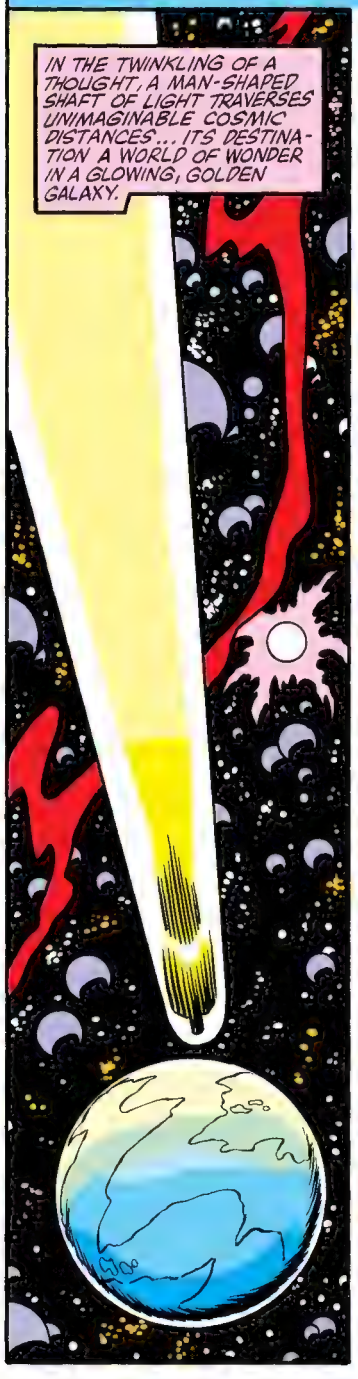
APPROVED BY THE COMICS CODE AUTHORITY

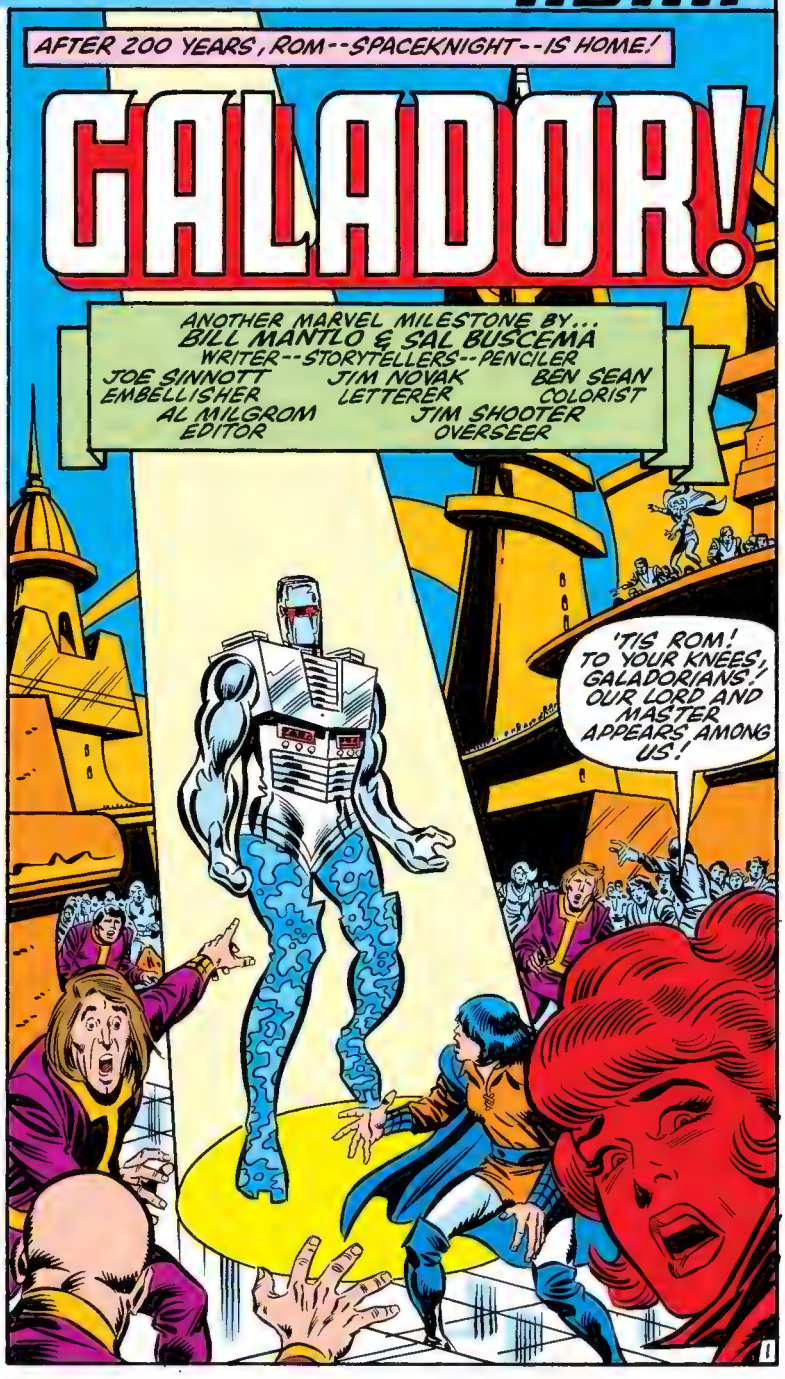
SPECIAL *DOUBLE-SIZED* ISSUE--
BUT TWO ROMS ARE *NOT* BETTER THAN ONE!



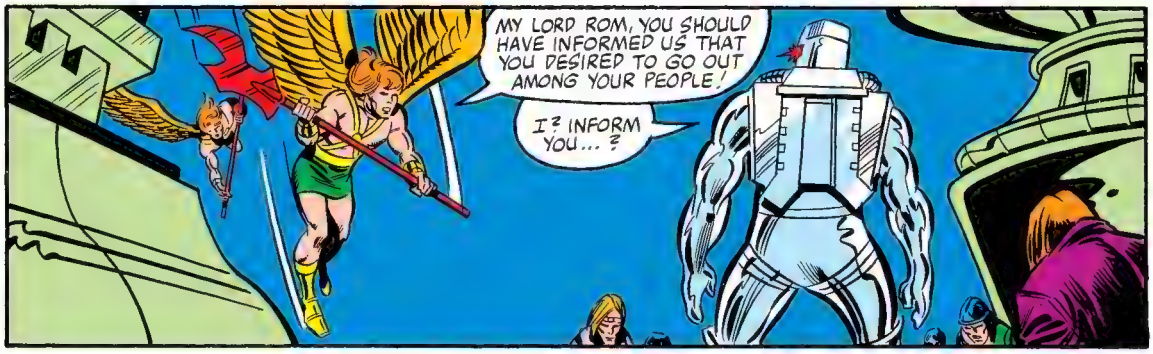
Two-hundred years ago, the evil Dire Wraiths threatened the peace-loving planet, Galador. In their homeworld's darkest hour, a thousand brave, young Galadorians sacrificed humanity itself to become Cyborg Warriors, a last desperate line of defense. Though hopelessly outnumbered, these Spaceknights triumphed, and pursued the remnants of the Wraith horde across the universe. Now, alone in the Enemy's mightiest stronghold, on a backward planet called Earth, one Galadorian Warrior faces his most awesome challenge.

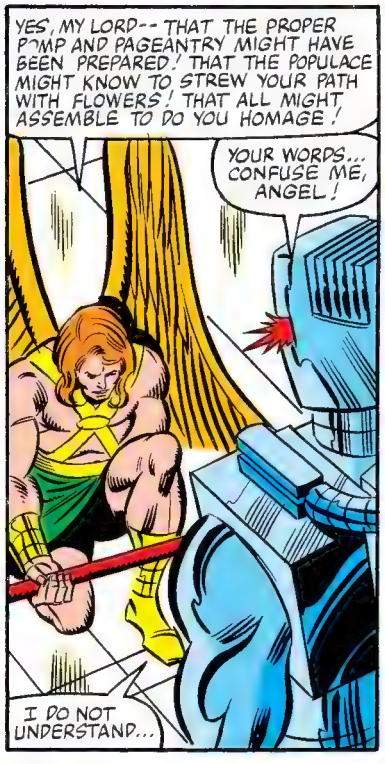
Stan Lee PRESENTS: THE GREATEST OF THE SPACEKNIGHTS--ROM!

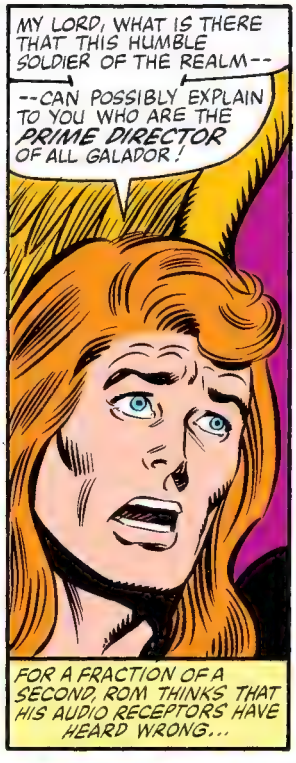

IN THE TWINKLING OF A THOUGHT, A MAN-SHAPED SHAFT OF LIGHT TRAVERSES UNIMAGINABLE COSMIC DISTANCES... ITS DESTINATION A WORLD OF WONDER IN A GLOWING, GOLDEN GALAXY.

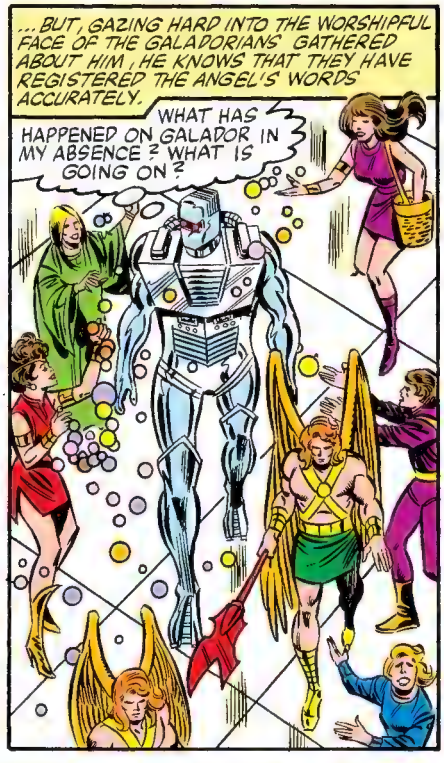


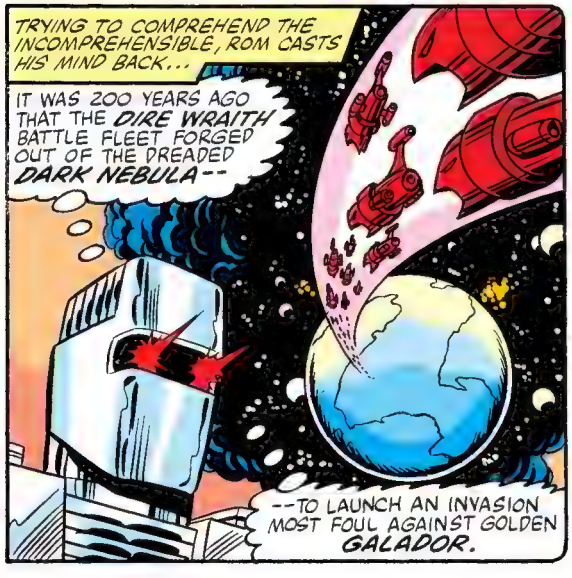
AS ROM'S MOLECULES REASSEMBLE, HE STANDS SPEECHLESS WITH WONDER UPON THE SURFACE OF THE WORLD FROM WHICH HE HAS TOO LONG BEEN ABSENT!
GALADOR'S PROUD CITIES STILL STAND, THEIR SPIRES REACHING TO THE SKY! GALADOR'S PEOPLE STILL LIVE, THEIR FACES FLUSHED WITH HEALTH! GALADOR EXISTS, DESPITE A WRAITH PROPHECY TO THE CONTRARY!
IT IS ALL AS HE'D LEFT IT TWO CENTURIES AGO--ALL AS ROM HAD HOPED IT WOULD BE UPON HIS EVENTUAL RETURN!
AND YET, OF ALL THE GESTURES OF GREETING THAT ROM COULD POSSIBLY HAVE EXPECTED FROM ROM'S CITIZENRY...
--OBEISANCE WAS NOT ONE--
--AND AWESTRUCK WORSHIP WAS NOT ANOTHER!
ROM!
LORD ROM!
MASTER!
BY THE GATES OF THE GOLDEN GALAXY, WHAT TRANSPIRES HERE?!
THE SOFT RUSTLE OF GREAT WINGS DRAWS ROM'S CYBORG EYES TO SCAN THE SKY. SHADOWS SWEEP THE GROUND, HERALDING THE COMING OF...
ANGELS!
THE ANGEL ELITE, GALADOR'S HOME GUARD!
2

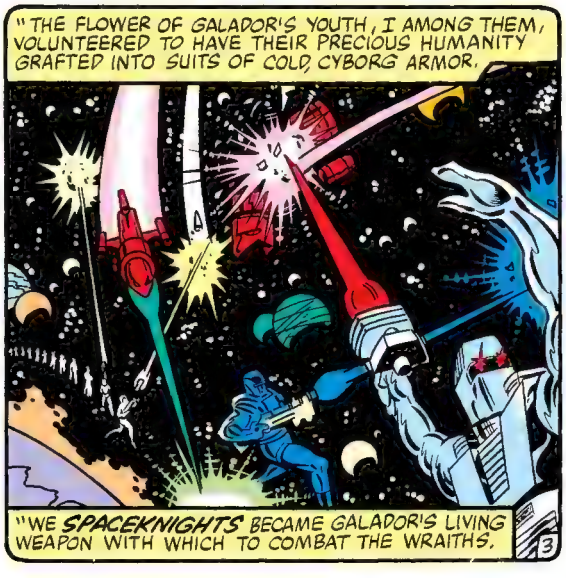

MY LORD ROM, YOU SHOULD HAVE INFORMED US THAT YOU DESIRED TO GO OUT AMONG YOUR PEOPLE!
I? INFORM YOU...?

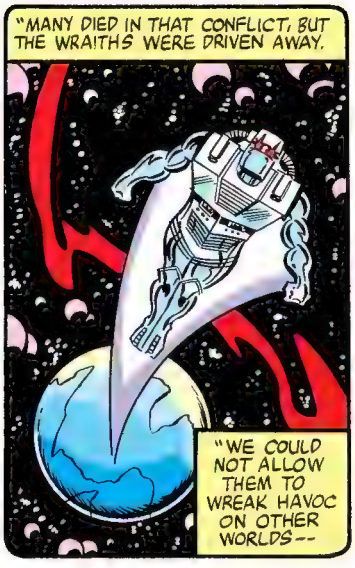

YES, MY LORD-- THAT THE PROPER POMP AND PAGEANTRY MIGHT HAVE BEEN PREPARED! THAT THE POPULACE MIGHT KNOW TO STREW YOUR PATH WITH FLOWERS! THAT ALL MIGHT ASSEMBLE TO DO YOU HOMAGE!
YOUR WORDS... CONFUSE ME, ANGEL!
I DO NOT UNDERSTAND...

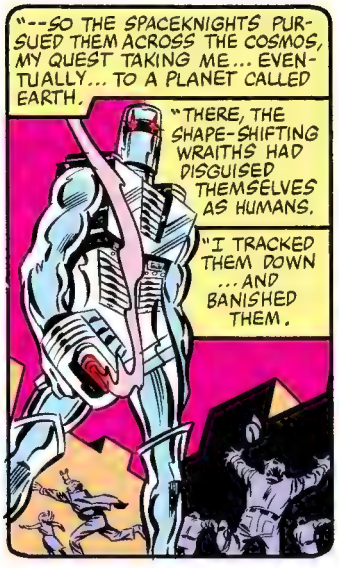

MY LORD, WHAT IS THERE THAT THIS HUMBLE SOLDIER OF THE REALM--
--CAN POSSIBLY EXPLAIN TO YOU WHO ARE THE PRIME DIRECTOR OF ALL GALADOR!
FOR A FRACTION OF A SECOND, ROM THINKS THAT HIS AUDIO RECEPTORS HAVE HEARD WRONG...

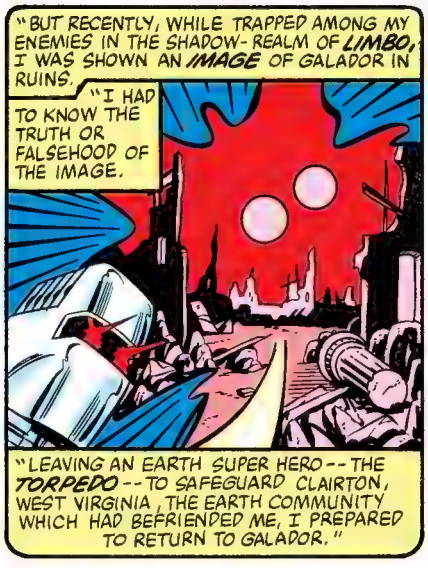

...BUT, GAZING HARD INTO THE WORSHIPFUL FACE OF THE GALADORIANS GATHERED ABOUT HIM, HE KNOWS THAT THEY HAVE REGISTERED THE ANGEL'S WORDS ACCURATELY.
WHAT HAS HAPPENED ON GALADOR IN MY ABSENCE? WHAT IS GOING ON?

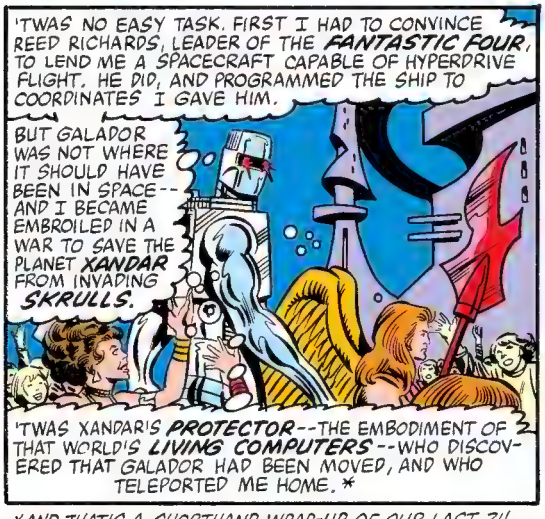

TRYING TO COMPREHEND THE INCOMPREHENSIBLE, ROM CASTS HIS MIND BACK...
IT WAS 200 YEARS AGO THAT THE DIRE WRAITH BATTLE FLEET FORGED OUT OF THE DREADED DARK NEBULA--
--TO LAUNCH AN INVASION MOST FOUL AGAINST GOLDEN GALADOR.


"THE FLOWER OF GALADOR'S YOUTH, I AMONG THEM, VOLUNTEERED TO HAVE THEIR PRECIOUS HUMANITY GRAFTED INTO SUITS OF COLD, CYBORG ARMOR.
"WE SPACEKNIGHTS BECAME GALADOR'S LIVING WEAPON WITH WHICH TO COMBAT THE WRAITHS.
3

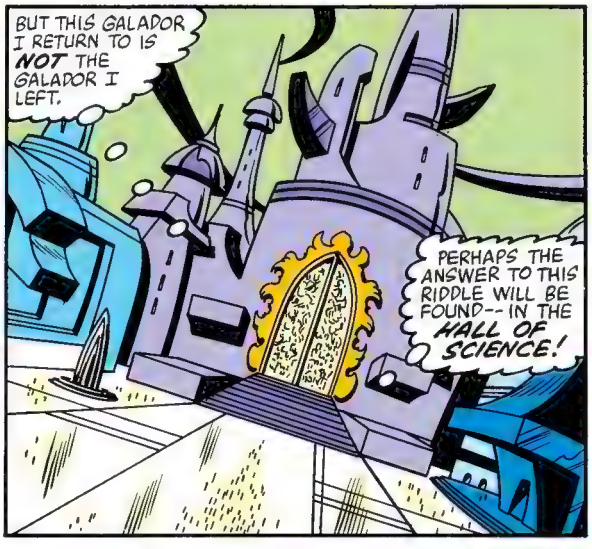


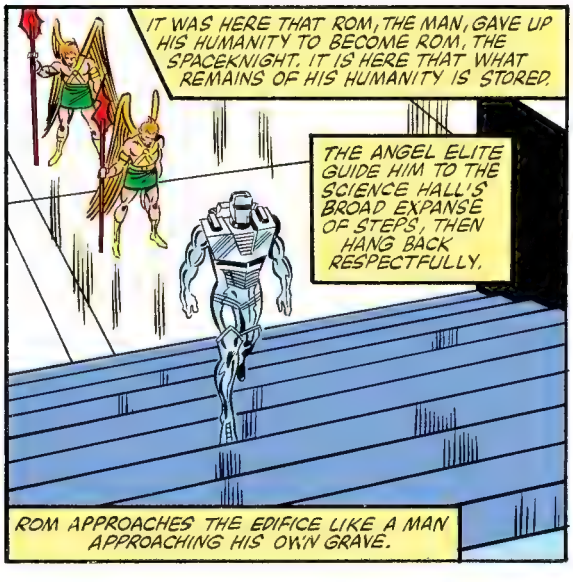

"--SO THE SPACEKNIGHTS PURSUED THEM ACROSS THE COSMOS, MY QUEST TAKING ME... EVENTUALLY... TO A PLANET CALLED EARTH.
"THERE, THE SHAPE-SHIFTING WRAITHS HAD DISGUISED THEMSELVES AS HUMANS.
"I TRACKED THEM DOWN ... AND BANISHED THEM.

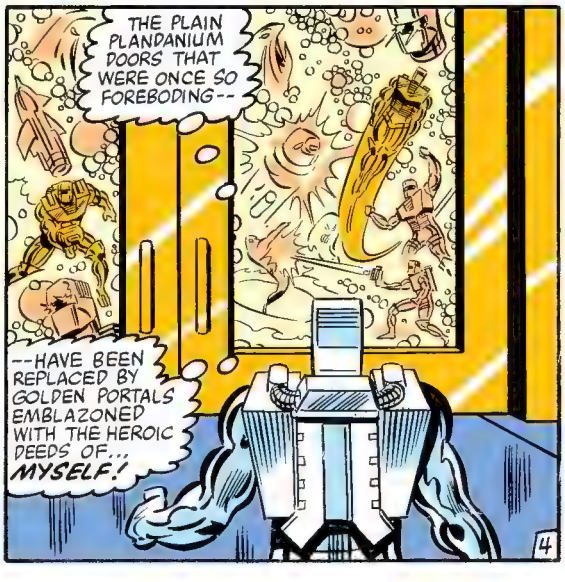

"BUT RECENTLY, WHILE TRAPPED AMONG MY ENEMIES IN THE SHADOW-REALM OF LIMBO, I WAS SHOWN AN IMAGE OF GALADOR IN RUINS.
"I HAD TO KNOW THE TRUTH OR FALSEHOOD OF THE IMAGE.
"LEAVING AN EARTH SUPER HERO--THE TORPEDO--TO SAFEGUARD CLAIRTON, WEST VIRGINIA, THE EARTH COMMUNITY WHICH HAD BEFRIENDED ME, I PREPARED TO RETURN TO GALADOR."

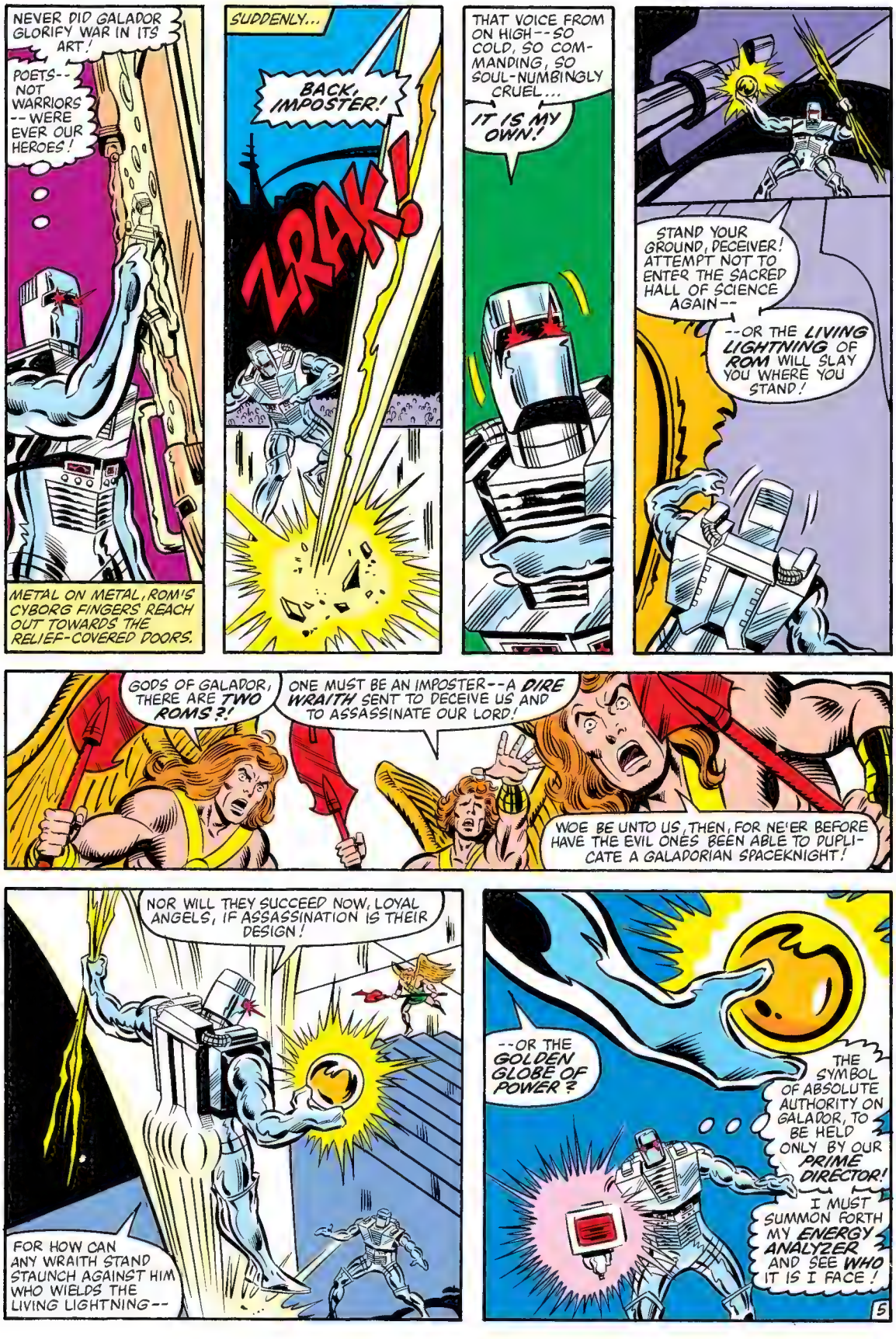

'TWAS NO EASY TASK. FIRST I HAD TO CONVINCE REED RICHARDS, LEADER OF THE FANTASTIC FOUR, TO LEND ME A SPACECRAFT CAPABLE OF HYPERDRIVE FLIGHT. HE DID, AND PROGRAMMED THE SHIP TO COORDINATES I GAVE HIM.
BUT GALADOR WAS NOT WHERE IT SHOULD HAVE BEEN IN SPACE--AND I BECAME EMBROILED IN A WAR TO SAVE THE PLANET XANDAR FROM INVADING SKRULLS.
'TWAS XANDAR'S PROTECTOR--THE EMBODIMENT OF THAT WORLD'S LIVING COMPUTERS--WHO DISCOVERED THAT GALADOR HAD BEEN MOVED, AND WHO TELEPORTED ME HOME.*

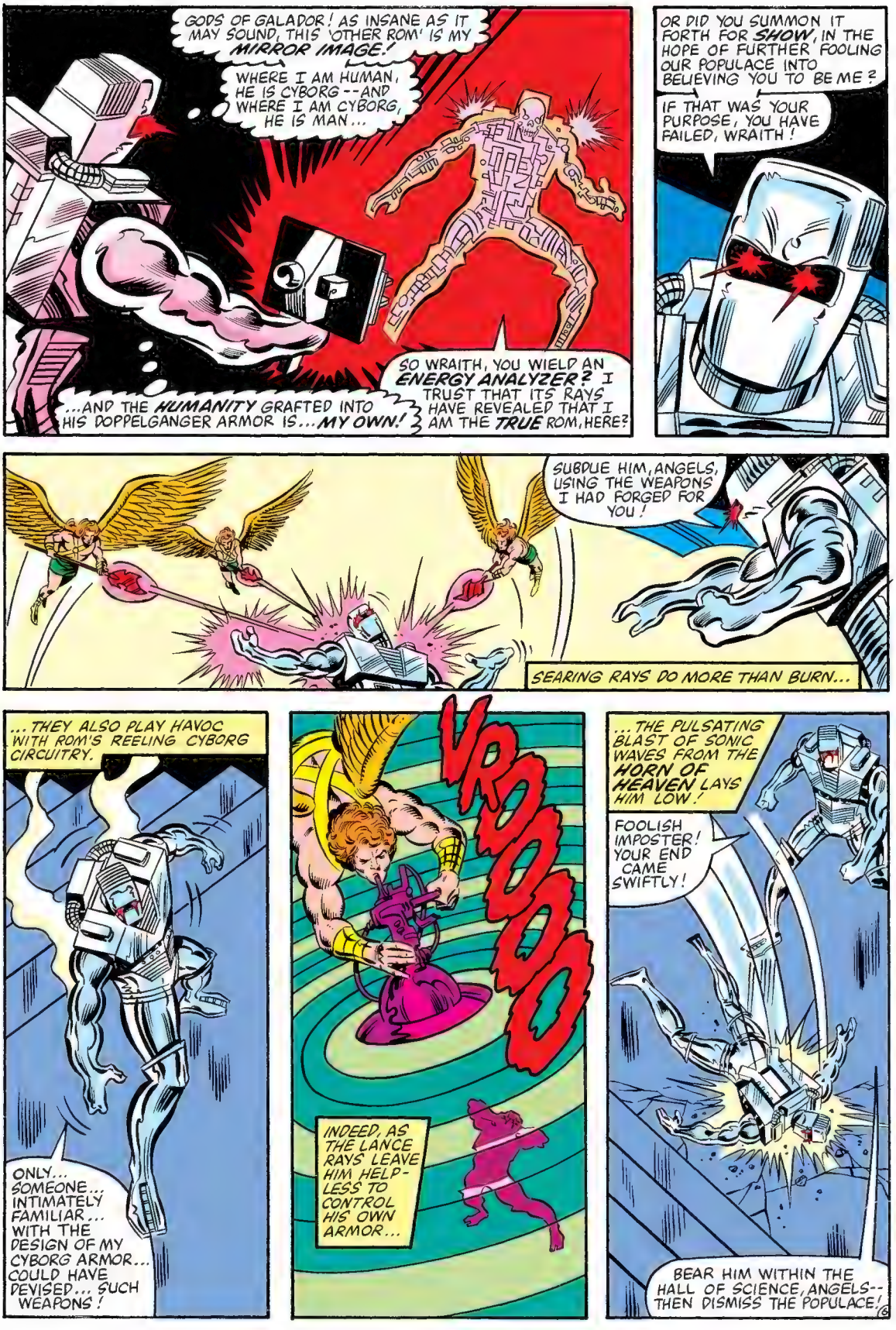
*AND THAT'S A SHORTHAND WRAP-UP OF OUR LAST 24 ISSUES!--AL.

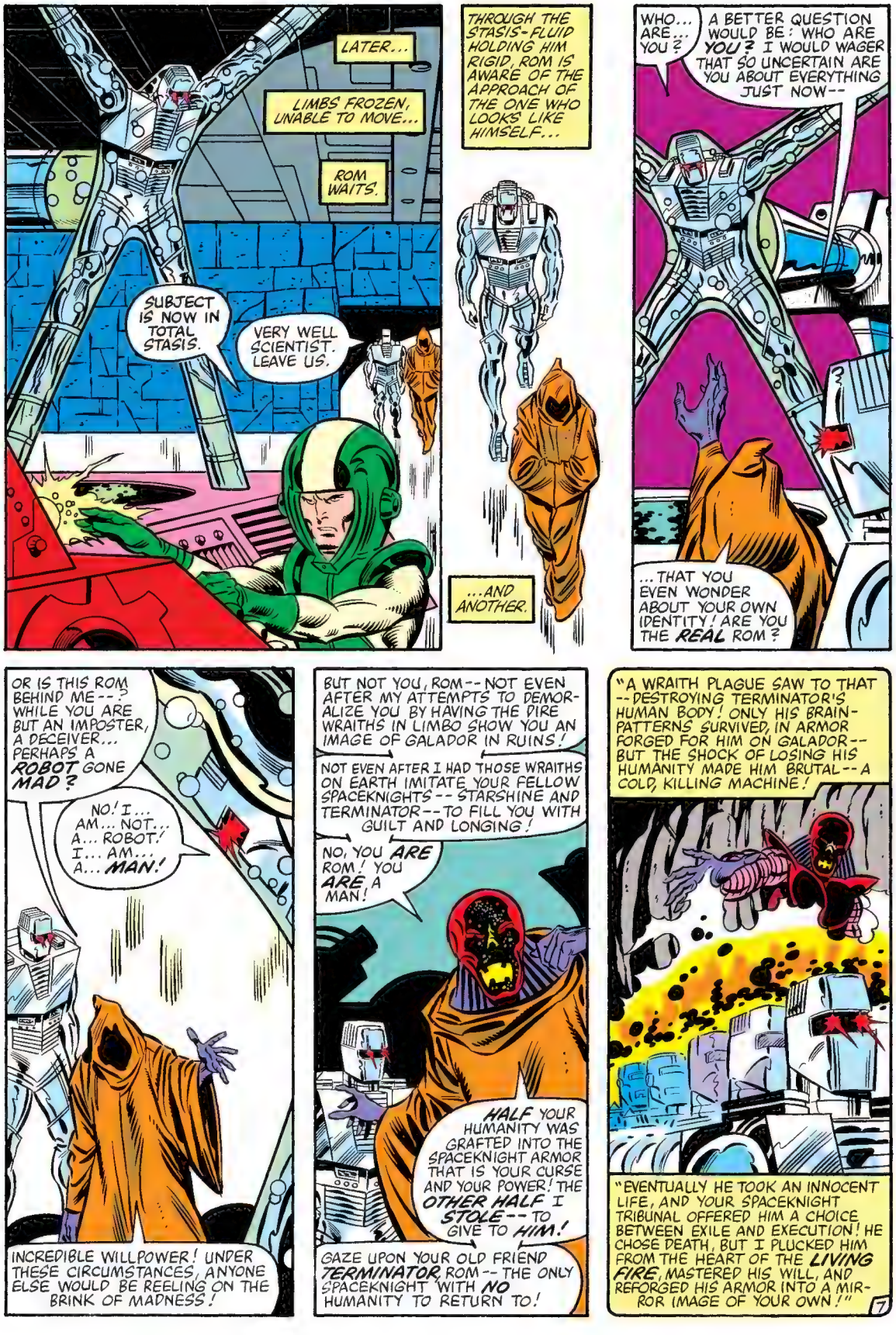

BUT THIS GALADOR I RETURN TO IS NOT THE GALADOR I LEFT.
PERHAPS THE ANSWER TO THIS RIDDLE WILL BE FOUND--IN THE HALL OF SCIENCE!

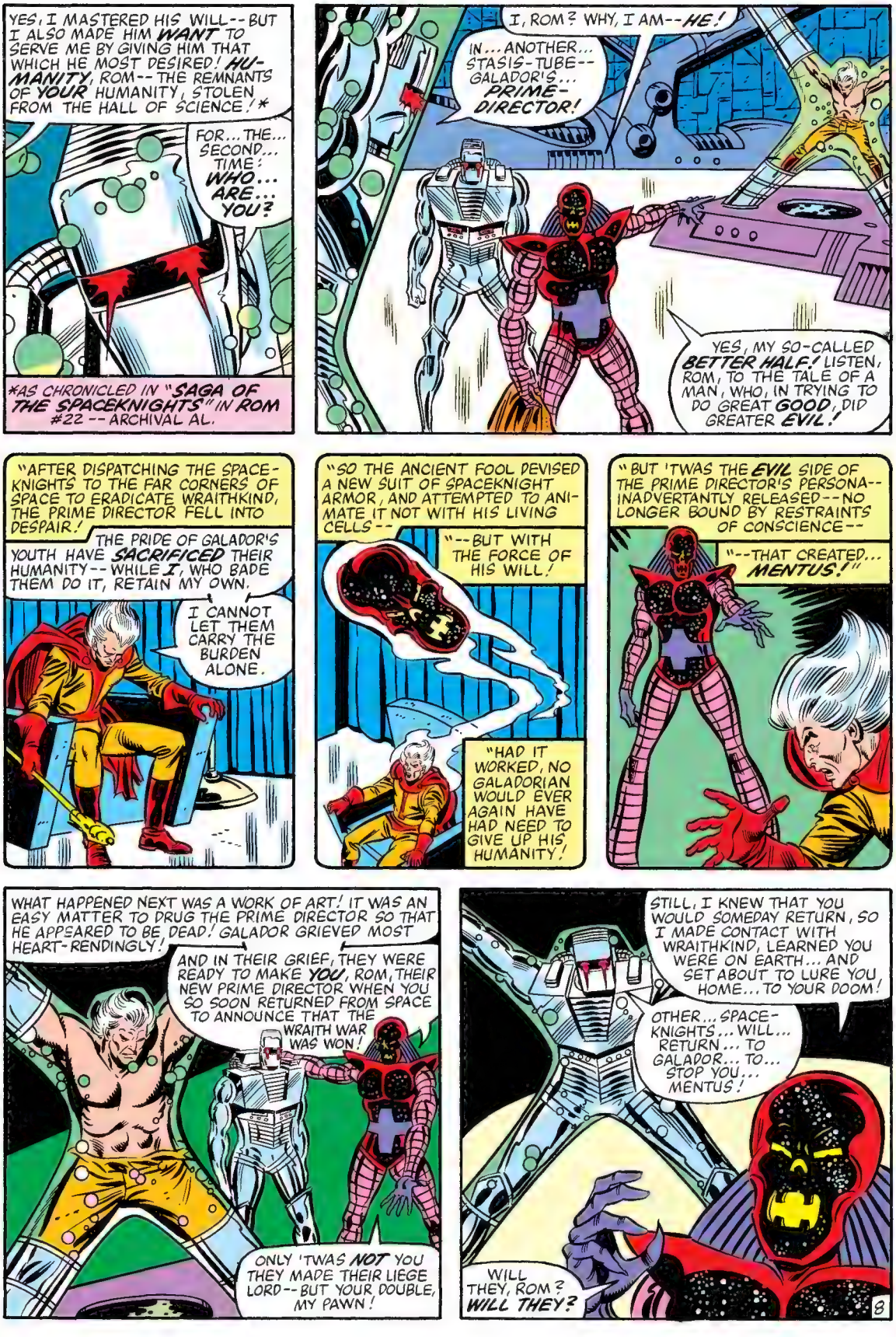

IT WAS HERE THAT ROM, THE MAN, GAVE UP HIS HUMANITY TO BECOME ROM, THE SPACEKNIGHT. IT IS HERE THAT WHAT REMAINS OF HIS HUMANITY IS STORED.
THE ANGEL ELITE GUIDE HIM TO THE SCIENCE HALL'S BROAD EXPANSE OF STEPS, THEN HANG BACK RESPECTFULLY.
ROM APPROACHES THE EDIFICE LIKE A MAN APPROACHING HIS OWN GRAVE.

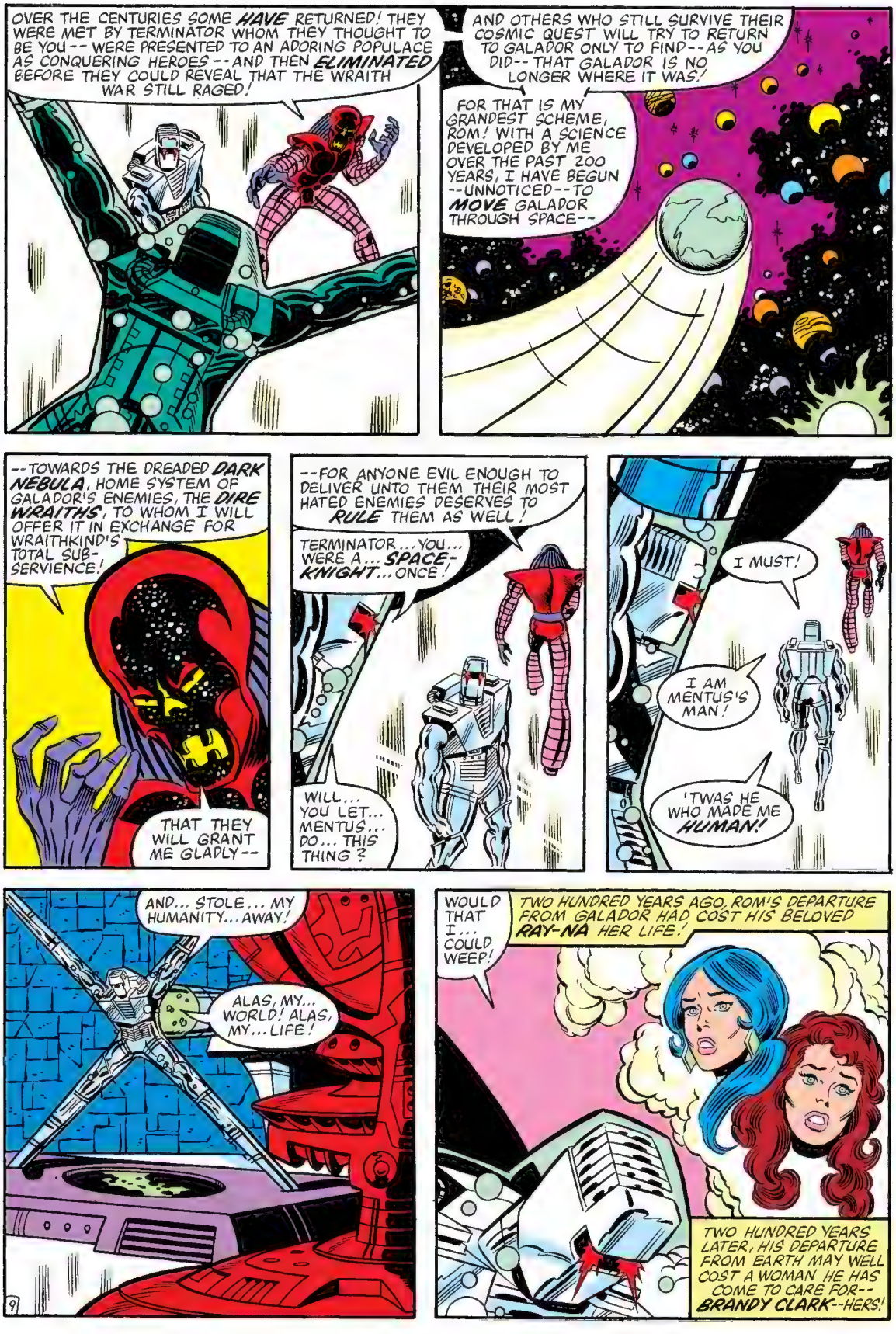

THE PLAIN PLANDANIUM DOORS THAT WERE ONCE SO FOREBODING--
--HAVE BEEN REPLACED BY GOLDEN PORTALS EMBLAZONED WITH THE HEROIC DEEDS OF... MYSELF!
4

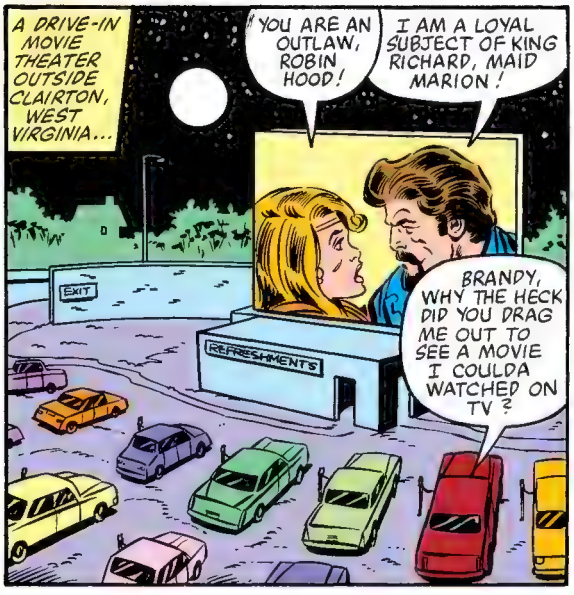

NEVER DID GALADOR GLORIFY WAR IN ITS ART!
POETS--NOT WARRIORS--WERE EVER OUR HEROES!
METAL ON METAL, ROM'S CYBORG FINGERS REACH OUT TOWARDS THE RELIEF-COVERED DOORS.
SUDDENLY...
BACK, IMPOSTER!
ZRAK!
THAT VOICE FROM ON HIGH--SO COLD, SO COMMANDING, SO SOUL-NUMBINGLY CRUEL...
IT IS MY OWN!
STAND YOUR GROUND, DECEIVER! ATTEMPT NOT TO ENTER THE SACRED HALL OF SCIENCE AGAIN--
--OR THE LIVING LIGHTNING OF ROM WILL SLAY YOU WHERE YOU STAND!
GODS OF GALADOR, THERE ARE TWO ROMS?!
ONE MUST BE AN IMPOSTER--A DIRE WRAITH SENT TO DECEIVE US AND TO ASSASSINATE OUR LORD!
WOE BE UNTO US, THEN, FOR NE'ER BEFORE HAVE THE EVIL ONES BEEN ABLE TO DUPLICATE A GALADORIAN SPACEKNIGHT!
NOR WILL THEY SUCCEED NOW, LOYAL ANGELS, IF ASSASSINATION IS THEIR DESIGN!
FOR HOW CAN ANY WRAITH STAND STAUNCH AGAINST HIM WHO WIELDS THE LIVING LIGHTNING--
--OR THE GOLDEN GLOBE OF POWER?
THE SYMBOL OF ABSOLUTE AUTHORITY ON GALADOR, TO BE HELD ONLY BY OUR PRIME DIRECTOR!
I MUST SUMMON FORTH MY ENERGY ANALYZER AND SEE WHO IT IS I FACE!
5

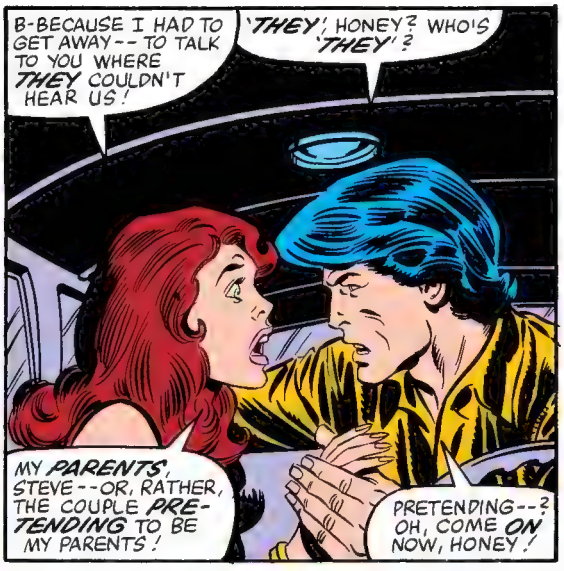

GODS OF GALADOR! AS INSANE AS IT MAY SOUND, THIS 'OTHER ROM' IS MY MIRROR IMAGE!
WHERE I AM HUMAN, HE IS CYBORG--AND WHERE I AM CYBORG, HE IS MAN...
...AND THE HUMANITY GRAFTED INTO HIS DOPPELGANGER ARMOR IS...MY OWN!
SO WRAITH, YOU WIELD AN ENERGY ANALYZER? I TRUST THAT ITS RAYS HAVE REVEALED THAT I AM THE TRUE ROM, HERE?
OR DID YOU SUMMON IT FORTH FOR SHOW, IN THE HOPE OF FURTHER FOOLING OUR POPULACE INTO BELIEVING YOU TO BE ME?
IF THAT WAS YOUR PURPOSE, YOU HAVE FAILED, WRAITH!
SUBDUE HIM, ANGELS, USING THE WEAPONS I HAD FORGED FOR YOU!
SEARING RAYS DO MORE THAN BURN...
...THEY ALSO PLAY HAVOC WITH ROM'S REELING CYBORG CIRCUITRY.
ONLY... SOMEONE... INTIMATELY FAMILIAR... WITH THE DESIGN OF MY CYBORG ARMOR... COULD HAVE DEVISED... SUCH WEAPONS!
VROOOO
INDEED, AS THE LANCE RAYS LEAVE HIM HELPLESS TO CONTROL HIS OWN ARMOR...
...THE PULSATING BLAST OF SONIC WAVES FROM THE HORN OF HEAVEN LAYS HIM LOW!
FOOLISH IMPOSTER! YOUR END CAME SWIFTLY!
BEAR HIM WITHIN THE HALL OF SCIENCE, ANGELS--THEN DISMISS THE POPULACE!

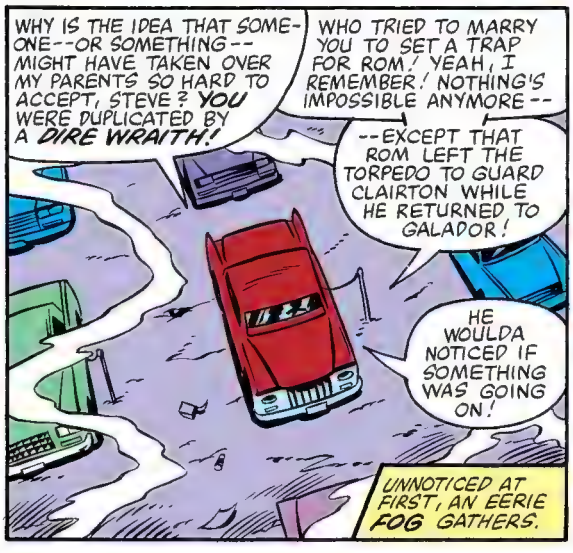

LATER...
LIMBS FROZEN, UNABLE TO MOVE...
ROM WAITS.
SUBJECT IS NOW IN TOTAL STASIS.
VERY WELL SCIENTIST. LEAVE US.
THROUGH THE STASIS-FLUID HOLDING HIM RIGID, ROM IS AWARE OF THE APPROACH OF THE ONE WHO LOOKS LIKE HIMSELF...
...AND ANOTHER.
WHO... ARE... YOU?
A BETTER QUESTION WOULD BE: WHO ARE YOU? I WOULD WAGER THAT SO UNCERTAIN ARE YOU ABOUT EVERYTHING JUST NOW--
...THAT YOU EVEN WONDER ABOUT YOUR OWN IDENTITY! ARE YOU THE REAL ROM?
OR IS THIS ROM BEHIND ME--? WHILE YOU ARE BUT AN IMPOSTER, A DECEIVER... PERHAPS A ROBOT GONE MAD?
NO! I... AM... NOT... A... ROBOT! I... AM... A... MAN!
INCREDIBLE WILLPOWER! UNDER THESE CIRCUMSTANCES, ANYONE ELSE WOULD BE REELING ON THE BRINK OF MADNESS!
BUT NOT YOU, ROM--NOT EVEN AFTER MY ATTEMPTS TO DEMORALIZE YOU BY HAVING THE FIRE WRAITHS IN LIMBO SHOW YOU AN IMAGE OF GALADOR IN RUINS!
NOT EVEN AFTER I HAD THOSE WRAITHS ON EARTH IMITATE YOUR FELLOW SPACEKNIGHTS -- STARSHINE AND TERMINATOR--TO FILL YOU WITH GUILT AND LONGING!
NO, YOU ARE ROM! YOU ARE A MAN!
HALF YOUR HUMANITY WAS GRAFTED INTO THE SPACEKNIGHT ARMOR THAT IS YOUR CURSE AND YOUR POWER! THE OTHER HALF I STOLE--TO GIVE TO HIM!
GAZE UPON YOUR OLD FRIEND TERMINATOR, ROM -- THE ONLY SPACEKNIGHT WITH NO HUMANITY TO RETURN TO!
"A WRAITH PLAGUE SAW TO THAT--DESTROYING TERMINATOR'S HUMAN BODY! ONLY HIS BRAIN-PATTERNS SURVIVED, IN ARMOR FORGED FOR HIM ON GALADOR--BUT THE SHOCK OF LOSING HIS HUMANITY MADE HIM BRUTAL--A COLD, KILLING MACHINE!
"EVENTUALLY HE TOOK AN INNOCENT LIFE, AND YOUR SPACEKNIGHT TRIBUNAL OFFERED HIM A CHOICE BETWEEN EXILE AND EXECUTION! HE CHOSE DEATH, BUT I PLUCKED HIM FROM THE HEART OF THE LIVING FIRE, MASTERED HIS WILL, AND REFORGED HIS ARMOR INTO A MIRROR IMAGE OF YOUR OWN!"
7

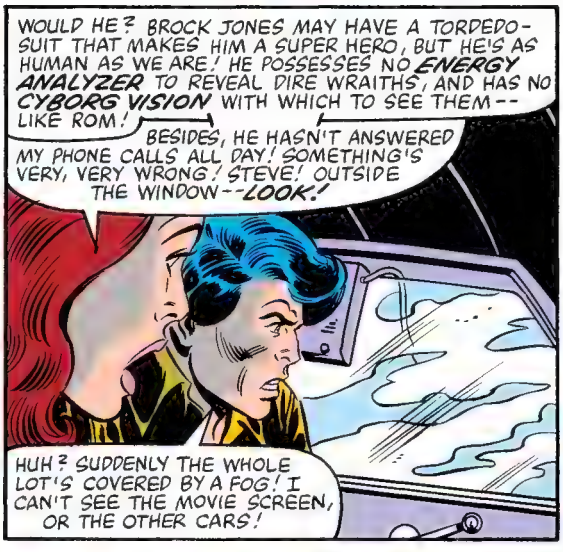

YES, I MASTERED HIS WILL--BUT I ALSO MADE HIM WANT TO SERVE ME BY GIVING HIM THAT WHICH HE MOST DESIRED! HUMANITY, ROM--THE REMNANTS OF YOUR HUMANITY, STOLEN FROM THE HALL OF SCIENCE!*
FOR...THE...SECOND...TIME! WHO...ARE...YOU?
*AS CHRONICLED IN "SAGA OF THE SPACEKNIGHTS" IN ROM #22 -- ARCHIVAL AL.
I, ROM? WHY, I AM--HE!
IN...ANOTHER...STASIS-TUBE--GALADOR'S...PRIME-DIRECTOR!
YES, MY SO-CALLED BETTER HALF! LISTEN, ROM, TO THE TALE OF A MAN, WHO, IN TRYING TO DO GREAT GOOD, DID GREATER EVIL!
"AFTER DISPATCHING THE SPACE-KNIGHTS TO THE FAR CORNERS OF SPACE TO ERADICATE WRAITHKIND, THE PRIME DIRECTOR FELL INTO DESPAIR!
THE PRIDE OF GALADOR'S YOUTH HAVE SACRIFICED THEIR HUMANITY--WHILE I, WHO BADE THEM DO IT, RETAIN MY OWN.
I CANNOT LET THEM CARRY THE BURDEN ALONE.
"SO THE ANCIENT FOOL DEVISED A NEW SUIT OF SPACEKNIGHT ARMOR, AND ATTEMPTED TO ANIMATE IT NOT WITH HIS LIVING CELLS--
"--BUT WITH THE FORCE OF HIS WILL!
"HAD IT WORKED, NO GALADORIAN WOULD EVER AGAIN HAVE HAD NEED TO GIVE UP HIS HUMANITY!
"BUT 'TWAS THE EVIL SIDE OF THE PRIME DIRECTOR'S PERSONA--INADVERTANTLY RELEASED--NO LONGER BOUND BY RESTRAINTS OF CONSCIENCE--
"--THAT CREATED...MENTUS!"
WHAT HAPPENED NEXT WAS A WORK OF ART! IT WAS AN EASY MATTER TO DRUG THE PRIME DIRECTOR SO THAT HE APPEARED TO BE DEAD! GALADOR GRIEVED MOST HEART-RENDINGLY!
AND IN THEIR GRIEF, THEY WERE READY TO MAKE YOU, ROM, THEIR NEW PRIME DIRECTOR WHEN YOU SO SOON RETURNED FROM SPACE TO ANNOUNCE THAT THE WRAITH WAR WAS WON!
ONLY 'TWAS NOT YOU THEY MADE THEIR LIEGE LORD--BUT YOUR DOUBLE, MY PAWN!
STILL, I KNEW THAT YOU WOULD SOMEDAY RETURN, SO I MADE CONTACT WITH WRAITHKIND, LEARNED YOU WERE ON EARTH...AND SET ABOUT TO LURE YOU HOME...TO YOUR DOOM!
OTHER...SPACE-KNIGHTS...WILL...RETURN...TO GALADOR...TO...STOP YOU...MENTUS!
WILL THEY, ROM? WILL THEY?
8


OVER THE CENTURIES SOME HAVE RETURNED! THEY WERE MET BY TERMINATOR WHOM THEY THOUGHT TO BE YOU -- WERE PRESENTED TO AN ADORING POPULACE AS CONQUERING HEROES -- AND THEN ELIMINATED BEFORE THEY COULD REVEAL THAT THE WRAITH WAR STILL RAGED!
AND OTHERS WHO STILL SURVIVE THEIR COSMIC QUEST WILL TRY TO RETURN TO GALADOR ONLY TO FIND -- AS YOU DID -- THAT GALADOR IS NO LONGER WHERE IT WAS!
FOR THAT IS MY GRANDEST SCHEME, ROM! WITH A SCIENCE DEVELOPED BY ME OVER THE PAST 200 YEARS, I HAVE BEGUN -- UNNOTICED -- TO MOVE GALADOR THROUGH SPACE --
-- TOWARDS THE DREADED DARK NEBULA, HOME SYSTEM OF GALADOR'S ENEMIES, THE DIRE WRAITHS, TO WHOM I WILL OFFER IT IN EXCHANGE FOR WRAITHKIND'S TOTAL SUB-SERVIENCE!
THAT THEY WILL GRANT ME GLADLY --
-- FOR ANYONE EVIL ENOUGH TO DELIVER UNTO THEM THEIR MOST HATED ENEMIES DESERVES TO RULE THEM AS WELL!
TERMINATOR... YOU... WERE A... SPACE-KNIGHT... ONCE!
WILL... YOU LET... MENTUS... DO... THIS THING?
I MUST!
I AM MENTUS'S MAN!
'TWAS HE WHO MADE ME HUMAN!
AND... STOLE... MY HUMANITY... AWAY!
ALAS, MY... WORLD! ALAS, MY... LIFE!
9
WOULD THAT I... COULD WEEP!
TWO HUNDRED YEARS AGO, ROM'S DEPARTURE FROM GALADOR HAD COST HIS BELOVED RAY-NA HER LIFE!
TWO HUNDRED YEARS LATER, HIS DEPARTURE FROM EARTH MAY WELL COST A WOMAN HE HAS COME TO CARE FOR -- BRANDY CLARK -- HERS!

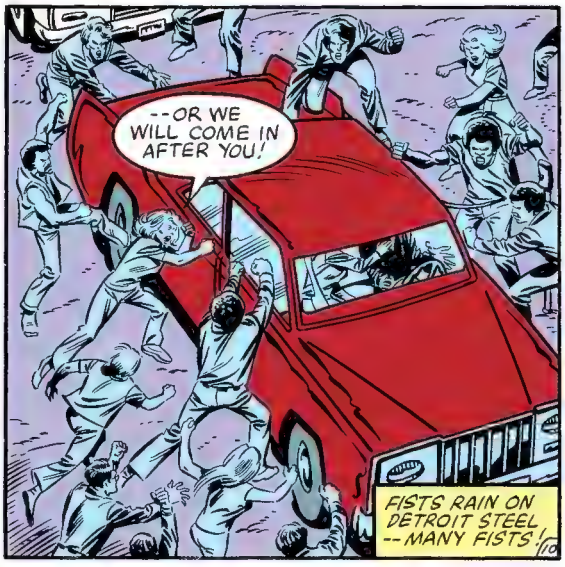

A DRIVE-IN MOVIE THEATER OUTSIDE CLAIRTON, WEST VIRGINIA...
YOU ARE AN OUTLAW, ROBIN HOOD!
I AM A LOYAL SUBJECT OF KING RICHARD, MAID MARION!
BRANDY, WHY THE HECK DID YOU DRAG ME OUT TO SEE A MOVIE I COULDA WATCHED ON TV?
EXIT
REFRESHMENTS


B-BECAUSE I HAD TO GET AWAY-- TO TALK TO YOU WHERE THEY COULDN'T HEAR US!
'THEY', HONEY? WHO'S 'THEY'?
MY PARENTS, STEVE--OR, RATHER, THE COUPLE PRETENDING TO BE MY PARENTS!
PRETENDING--? OH, COME ON NOW, HONEY!

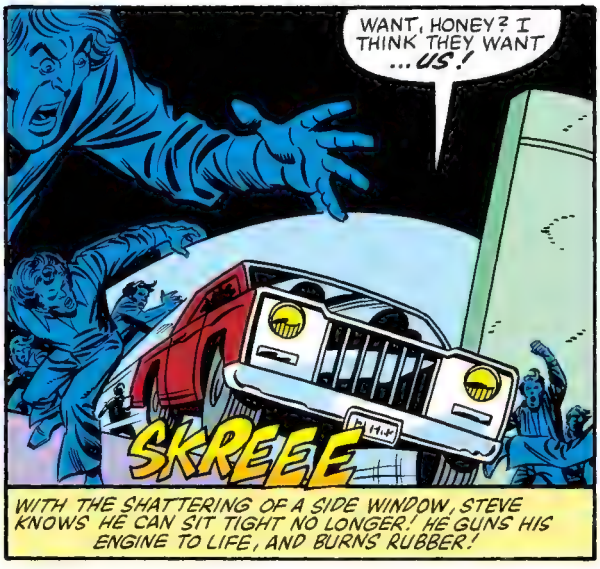

WHY IS THE IDEA THAT SOMEONE--OR SOMETHING--MIGHT HAVE TAKEN OVER MY PARENTS SO HARD TO ACCEPT, STEVE? YOU WERE DUPLICATED BY A DIRE WRAITH!
WHO TRIED TO MARRY YOU TO SET A TRAP FOR ROM! YEAH, I REMEMBER! NOTHING'S IMPOSSIBLE ANYMORE--
--EXCEPT THAT ROM LEFT THE TORPEDO TO GUARD CLAIRTON WHILE HE RETURNED TO GALADOR!
HE WOULDA NOTICED IF SOMETHING WAS GOING ON!
UNNOTICED AT FIRST, AN EERIE FOG GATHERS.

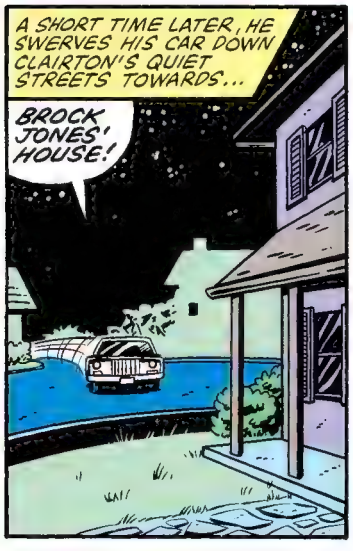

WOULD HE? BROCK JONES MAY HAVE A TORPEDO-SUIT THAT MAKES HIM A SUPER HERO, BUT HE'S AS HUMAN AS WE ARE! HE POSSESSES NO ENERGY ANALYZER TO REVEAL DIRE WRAITHS, AND HAS NO CYBORG VISION WITH WHICH TO SEE THEM--LIKE ROM!
BESIDES, HE HASN'T ANSWERED MY PHONE CALLS ALL DAY! SOMETHING'S VERY, VERY WRONG! STEVE! OUTSIDE THE WINDOW--LOOK!
HUH? SUDDENLY THE WHOLE LOT'S COVERED BY A FOG! I CAN'T SEE THE MOVIE SCREEN, OR THE OTHER CARS!

THE STRANGE MIST ALSO HIDES THE FACT THAT THE OTHER MOVIEGOERS ARE NO LONGER IN THEIR CARS --UNTIL...
UH, HI!
COME OUT, STEVE JACKSON!


--OR WE WILL COME IN AFTER YOU!
FISTS RAIN ON DETROIT STEEL, --MANY FISTS!

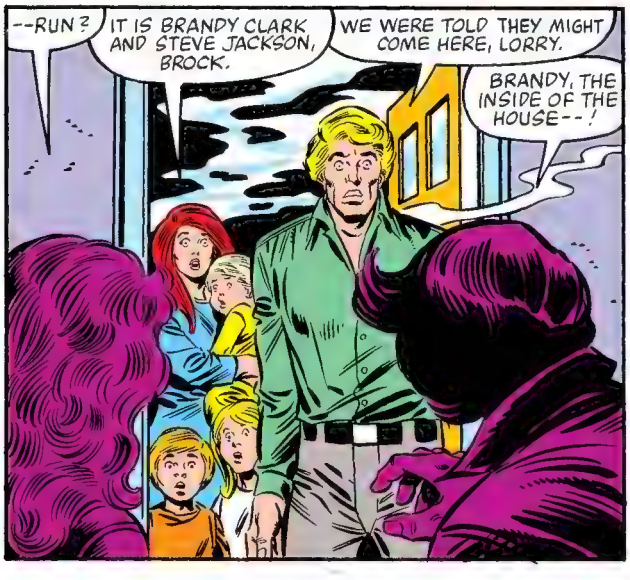
IT--IT'S AS IF THE WHOLE TOWN'S GONE MAD--INSANE! WHAT'S WRONG WITH THEM, STEVE?
I DUNNO, BRAN'! WE KNOW MOST OF THOSE PEOPLE OUT THERE--OR I *THOUGHT* WE DID!
NOW IT'S LIKE THEY'VE ALL BEEN BODY-SNATCHED!
WHY ARE THEY DOING THIS? WHAT DO THEY WANT?


WANT, HONEY? I THINK THEY WANT ...*US!*
SKREEE
WITH THE SHATTERING OF A SIDE WINDOW, STEVE KNOWS HE CAN SIT TIGHT NO LONGER! HE GUNS HIS ENGINE TO LIFE, AND BURNS RUBBER!

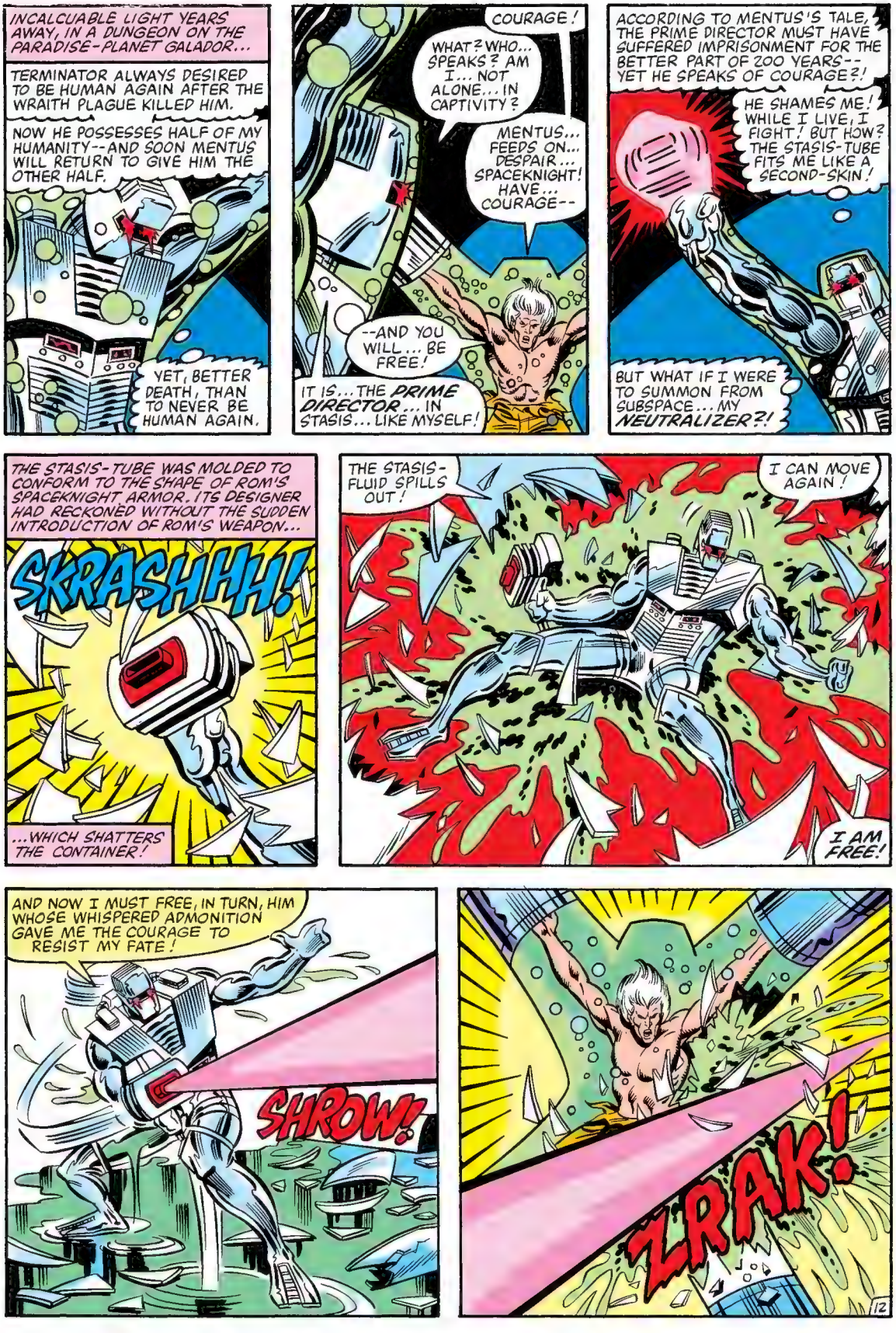

A SHORT TIME LATER, HE SWERVES HIS CAR DOWN CLAIRTON'S QUIET STREETS TOWARDS...
BROCK JONES' HOUSE!

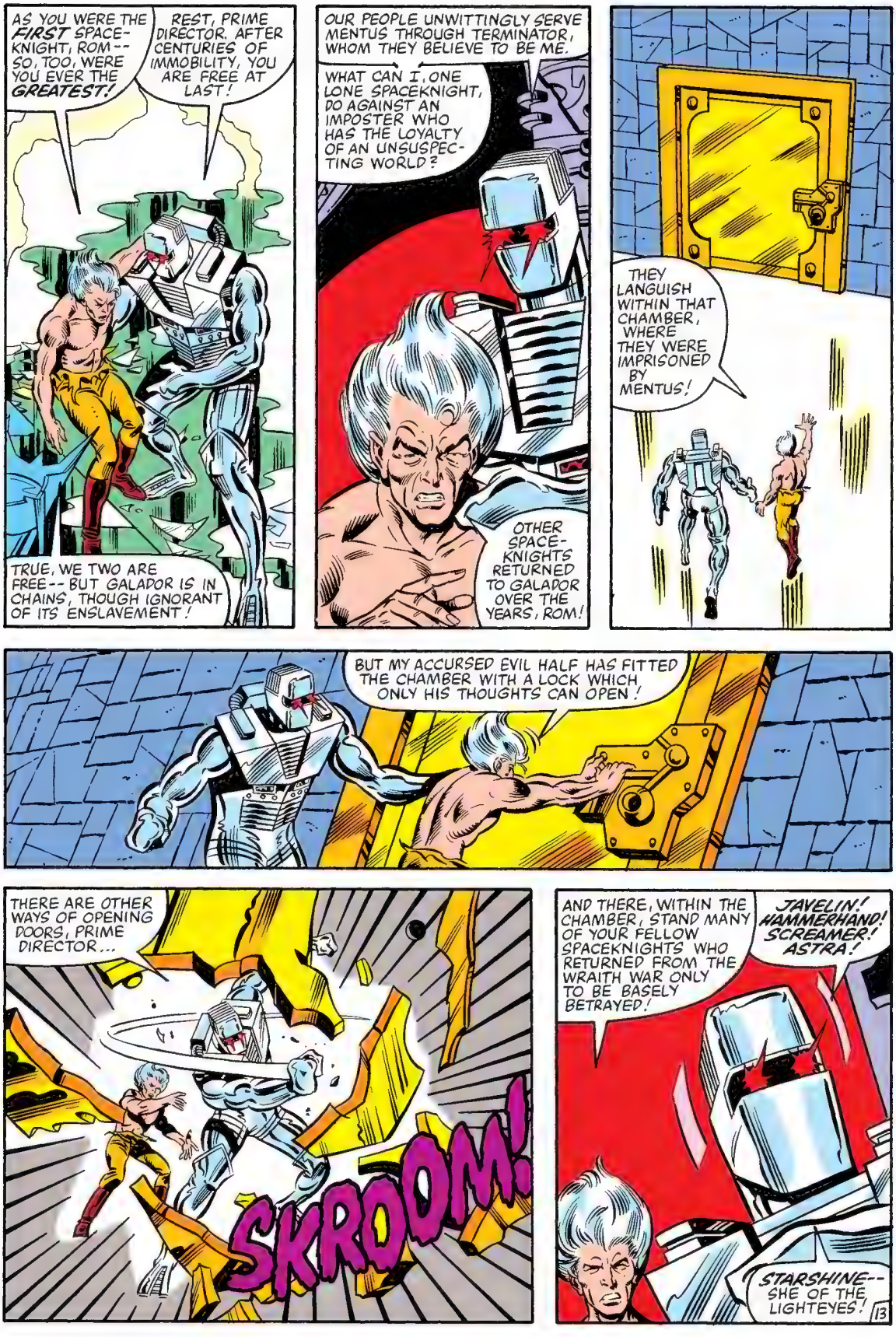
OH, STEVE, WHAT DO WE DO IF THE TORPEDO ISN'T HOME?
HE'S GOTTA BE, BRANDY--ALL THE LIGHTS ARE ON!

HOWEVER, FIVE MINUTES OF FRANTIC HAMMERING AT THE FRONT DOOR YIELDS NO RESULT.
C'MON, HERO-MAN! WHERE IN BLAZES ARE YOU WHEN WE NEED YOU?
STEVE, ISN'T IT ODD THAT NO ONE FOLLOWED US FROM THE DRIVE-IN? I MEAN, WHAT IF THEY KNEW THERE WAS NO PLACE FOR US TO--

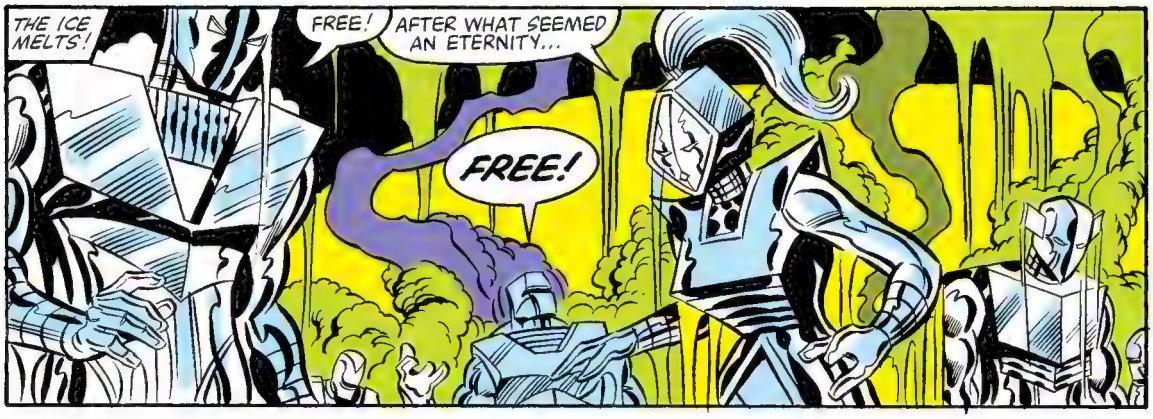

--RUN?
IT IS BRANDY CLARK AND STEVE JACKSON, BROCK.
WE WERE TOLD THEY MIGHT COME HERE, LORRY.
BRANDY, THE INSIDE OF THE HOUSE--!

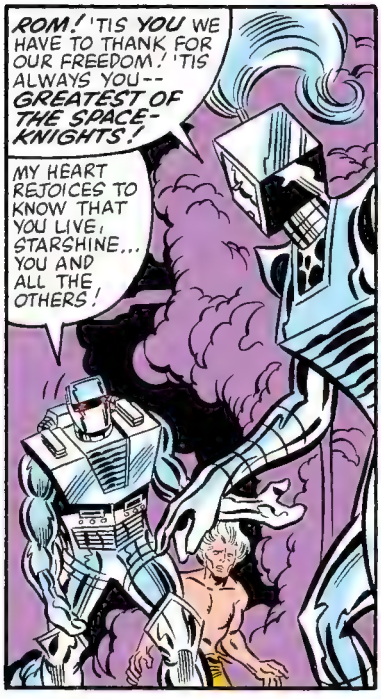
IT'S FILLED WITH THE SAME FOG THAT CHANGED EVERY-ONE AT THE DRIVE-IN!
YES, IT IS!


INCALCUABLE LIGHT YEARS AWAY, IN A DUNGEON ON THE PARADISE-PLANET GALADOR...
TERMINATOR ALWAYS DESIRED TO BE HUMAN AGAIN AFTER THE WRAITH PLAGUE KILLED HIM.
NOW HE POSSESSES HALF OF MY HUMANITY--AND SOON MENTUS WILL RETURN TO GIVE HIM THE OTHER HALF.
YET, BETTER DEATH, THAN TO NEVER BE HUMAN AGAIN.
COURAGE!
WHAT? WHO... SPEAKS? AM I... NOT ALONE... IN CAPTIVITY?
MENTUS... FEEDS ON... DESPAIR... SPACEKNIGHT! HAVE... COURAGE--
--AND YOU WILL... BE FREE!
IT IS... THE PRIME DIRECTOR... IN STASIS... LIKE MYSELF!
ACCORDING TO MENTUS'S TALE, THE PRIME DIRECTOR MUST HAVE SUFFERED IMPRISONMENT FOR THE BETTER PART OF 200 YEARS-- YET HE SPEAKS OF COURAGE?!
HE SHAMES ME! WHILE I LIVE, I FIGHT! BUT HOW? THE STASIS-TUBE FITS ME LIKE A SECOND-SKIN!
BUT WHAT IF I WERE TO SUMMON FROM SUBSPACE... MY NEUTRALIZER?!
THE STASIS-TUBE WAS MOLDED TO CONFORM TO THE SHAPE OF ROM'S SPACEKNIGHT ARMOR. ITS DESIGNER HAD RECKONED WITHOUT THE SUDDEN INTRODUCTION OF ROM'S WEAPON...
SKRASHHH!
...WHICH SHATTERS THE CONTAINER!
THE STASIS-FLUID SPILLS OUT!
I CAN MOVE AGAIN!
I AM FREE!
AND NOW I MUST FREE, IN TURN, HIM WHOSE WHISPERED ADMONITION GAVE ME THE COURAGE TO RESIST MY FATE!
SHROW!
ZRAK!
12

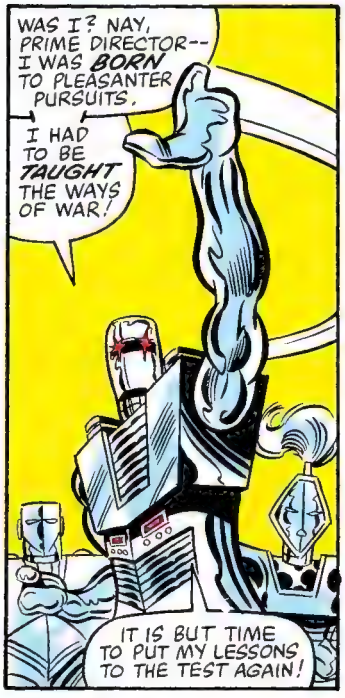

AS YOU WERE THE FIRST SPACE-KNIGHT, ROM -- SO, TOO, WERE YOU EVER THE GREATEST!
REST, PRIME DIRECTOR. AFTER CENTURIES OF IMMOBILITY, YOU ARE FREE AT LAST!
TRUE, WE TWO ARE FREE -- BUT GALADOR IS IN CHAINS, THOUGH IGNORANT OF ITS ENSLAVEMENT!
OUR PEOPLE UNWITTINGLY SERVE MENTUS THROUGH TERMINATOR, WHOM THEY BELIEVE TO BE ME.
WHAT CAN I, ONE LONE SPACEKNIGHT, DO AGAINST AN IMPOSTER WHO HAS THE LOYALTY OF AN UNSUSPECTING WORLD?
OTHER SPACE-KNIGHTS RETURNED TO GALADOR OVER THE YEARS, ROM!
THEY LANGUISH WITHIN THAT CHAMBER, WHERE THEY WERE IMPRISONED BY MENTUS!
BUT MY ACCURSED EVIL HALF HAS FITTED THE CHAMBER WITH A LOCK WHICH, ONLY HIS THOUGHTS CAN OPEN!
THERE ARE OTHER WAYS OF OPENING DOORS, PRIME DIRECTOR...
SKROOM!
AND THERE, WITHIN THE CHAMBER, STAND MANY OF YOUR FELLOW SPACEKNIGHTS WHO RETURNED FROM THE WRAITH WAR ONLY TO BE BASELY BETRAYED!
JAVELIN! HAMMERHAND! SCREAMER! ASTRA!
STARSHINE -- SHE OF THE LIGHTEYES!
13

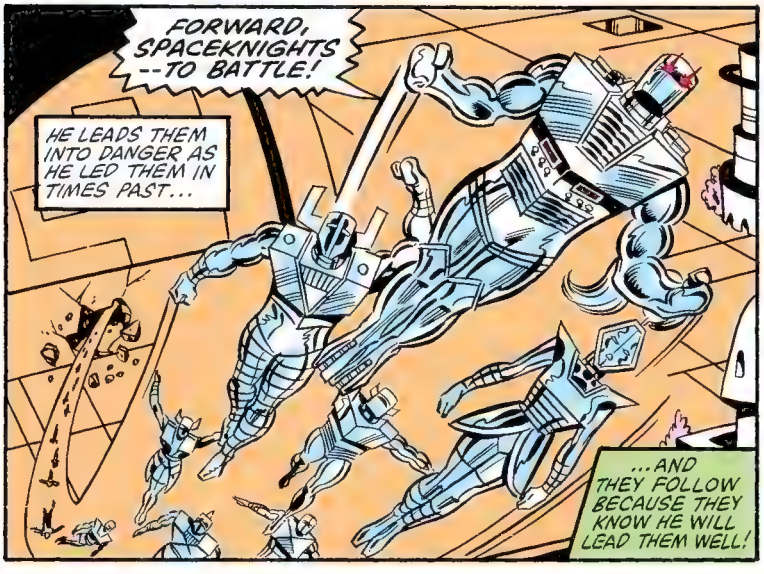
FROZEN IN SUSPENDED ANIMATION! ALL FROZEN!
DECEIVED BY TERMINATOR, AND DOOMED BY MENTUS!
DOOMED--?
TO EVER-LASTING SLEEP, ROM--NOT DEATH!
THEY LIVE--AND YOUR NEUTRALIZER SHALL REVIVE THEM!
YES!
SET ON WIDE-BEAM, THE NEUTRALIZER'S RAYS SEEK OUT THE ENERGY-FIELD KEEPING THE SPACEKNIGHTS FROZEN... AND NEUTRALIZE IT!
14


THE ICE MELTS!
FREE!
AFTER WHAT SEEMED AN ETERNITY...
FREE!

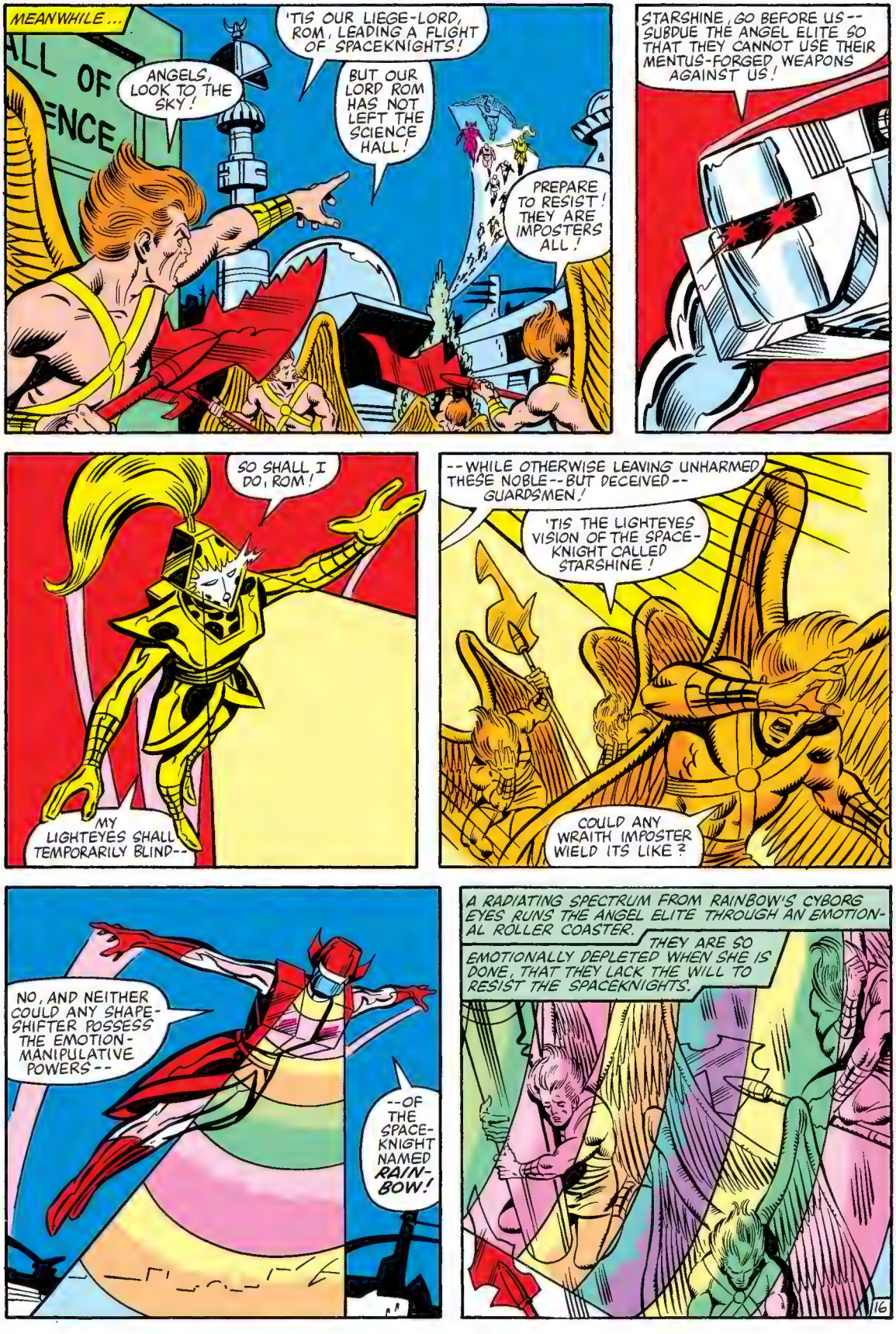

ROM! 'TIS YOU WE HAVE TO THANK FOR OUR FREEDOM! 'TIS ALWAYS YOU-- GREATEST OF THE SPACE-KNIGHTS!
MY HEART REJOICES TO KNOW THAT YOU LIVE, STARSHINE... YOU AND ALL THE OTHERS!

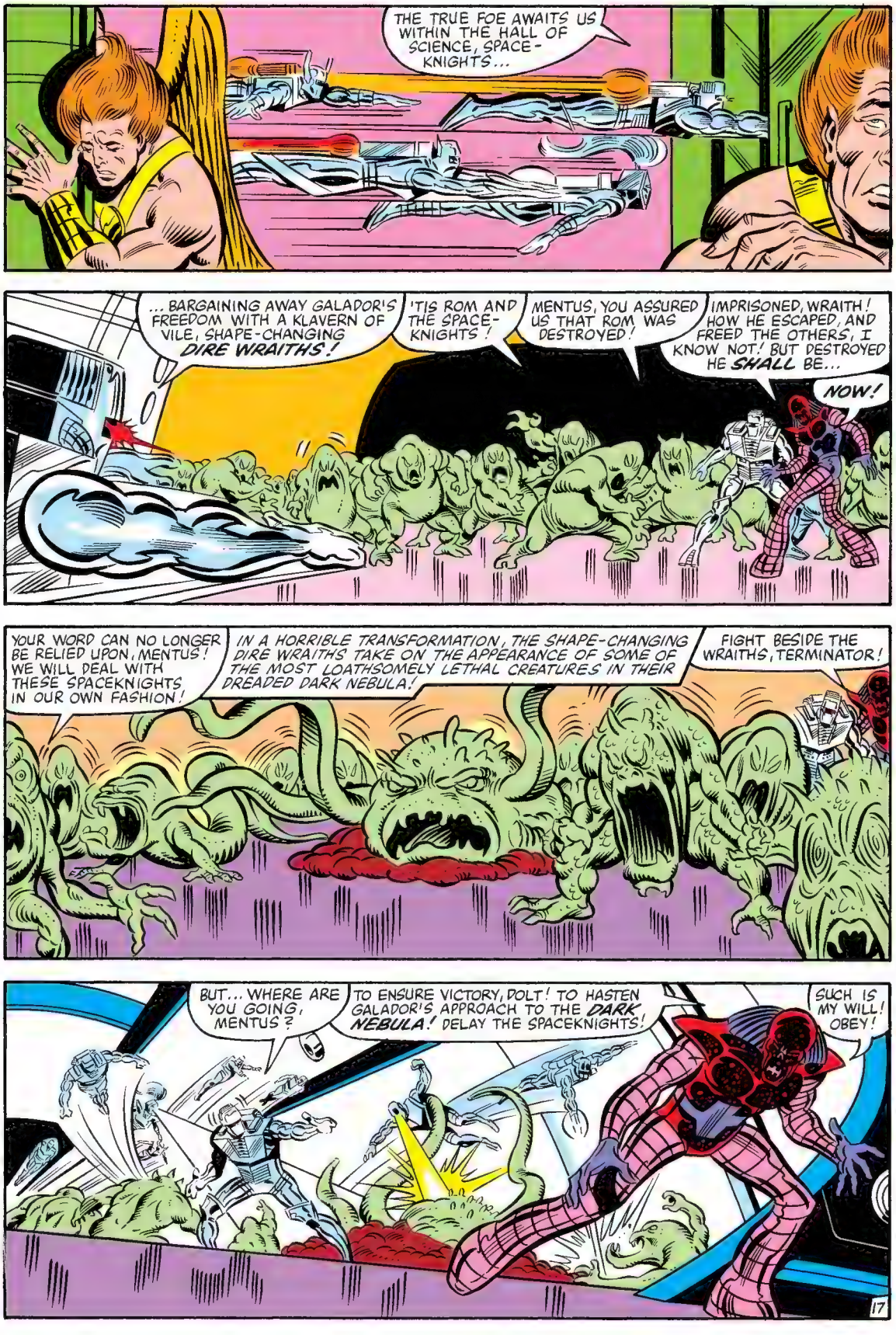
BUT THERE IS NO TIME FOR JOYOUS REUNION. GALADOR IS ENSLAVED-- RULED BY AN IMPOSTER IN MY ARMOR ... WHO, IN TURN, IS RULED BY A MADMAN.
MENTUS? AYE, WE KNOW THAT ONE WELL!
LEAD THE SPACEKNIGHTS AGAINST MENTUS' EVIL, ROM! SUCH IS THE TASK YOU WERE BORN TO DO!

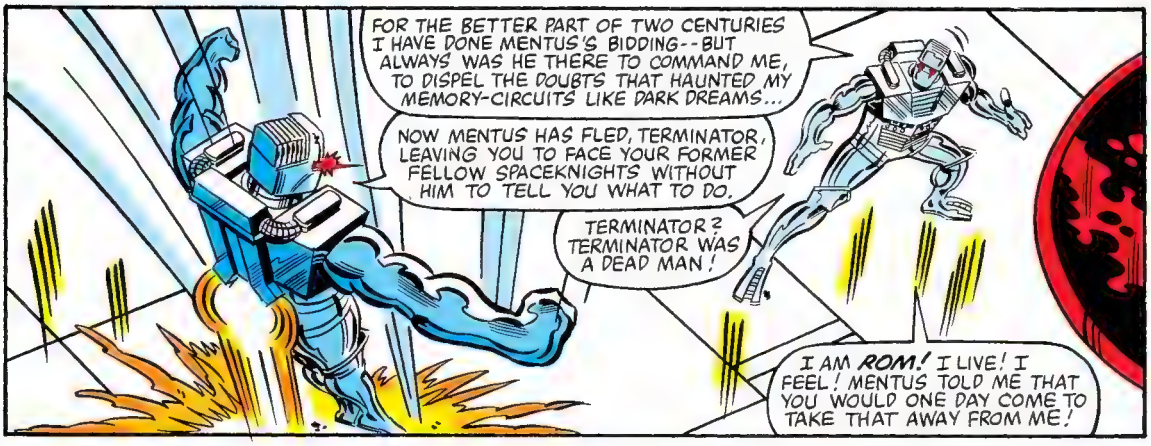

WAS I? NAY, PRIME DIRECTOR-- I WAS BORN TO PLEASANTER PURSUITS.
I HAD TO BE TAUGHT THE WAYS OF WAR!
IT IS BUT TIME TO PUT MY LESSONS TO THE TEST AGAIN!


FORWARD, SPACEKNIGHTS --TO BATTLE!
HE LEADS THEM INTO DANGER AS HE LED THEM IN TIMES PAST...
...AND THEY FOLLOW BECAUSE THEY KNOW HE WILL LEAD THEM WELL!

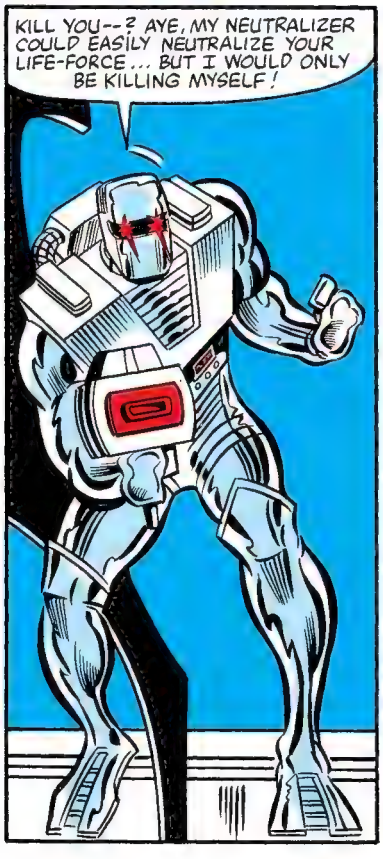
AGAIN THE YOUNG GO FORTH TO FACE THE FOE, WHILE THE OLD HANG BACK TO WATCH!
THIS TIME, HOWE'ER, THERE IS DANGER ENOUGH FOR ALL!
WHILE ROM GOES TO FREE GALADOR FROM HIS DOUBLE-- I MUST PREPARE TO CONFRONT THE GREATER PERIL!
THE DEPOSED PRIME DIRECTOR OF GALADOR WENDS HIS WAY OUT OF THE DUNGEON'S DARKNESS.
15

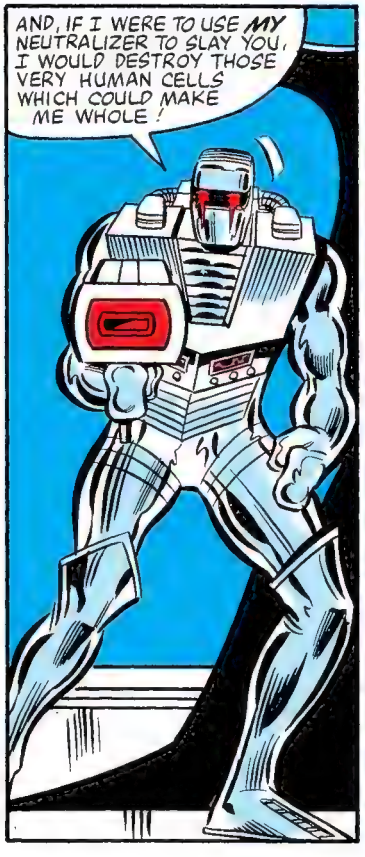

MEANWHILE ...
ANGELS, LOOK TO THE SKY!
'TIS OUR LIEGE-LORD, ROM, LEADING A FLIGHT OF SPACEKNIGHTS!
BUT OUR LORD ROM HAS NOT LEFT THE SCIENCE HALL!
PREPARE TO RESIST! THEY ARE IMPOSTERS ALL!
STARSHINE, GO BEFORE US -- SUBDUE THE ANGEL ELITE SO THAT THEY CANNOT USE THEIR MENTUS-FORGED WEAPONS AGAINST US!
SO SHALL I DO, ROM!
MY LIGHTEYES SHALL TEMPORARILY BLIND--
--WHILE OTHERWISE LEAVING UNHARMED THESE NOBLE--BUT DECEIVED-- GUARDSMEN!
'TIS THE LIGHTEYES VISION OF THE SPACE-KNIGHT CALLED STARSHINE!
COULD ANY WRAITH IMPOSTER WIELD ITS LIKE?
NO, AND NEITHER COULD ANY SHAPE-SHIFTER POSSESS THE EMOTION-MANIPULATIVE POWERS--
--OF THE SPACE-KNIGHT NAMED RAIN-BOW!
A RADIATING SPECTRUM FROM RAINBOW'S CYBORG EYES RUNS THE ANGEL ELITE THROUGH AN EMOTION-AL ROLLER COASTER.
THEY ARE SO EMOTIONALLY DEPLETED WHEN SHE IS DONE, THAT THEY LACK THE WILL TO RESIST THE SPACEKNIGHTS.
16

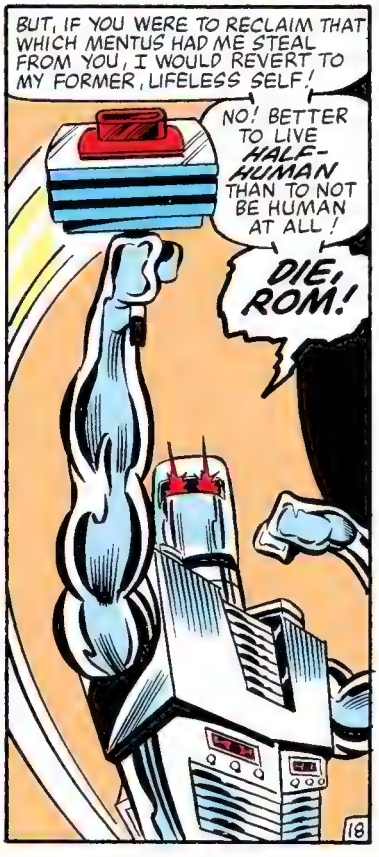

THE TRUE FOE AWAITS US WITHIN THE HALL OF SCIENCE, SPACE-KNIGHTS...
... BARGAINING AWAY GALADOR'S FREEDOM WITH A KLAVERN OF VILE, SHAPE-CHANGING DIRE WRAITHS!
'TIS ROM AND THE SPACE-KNIGHTS!
MENTUS, YOU ASSURED US THAT ROM WAS DESTROYED!
IMPRISONED, WRAITH! HOW HE ESCAPED, AND FREED THE OTHERS, I KNOW NOT! BUT DESTROYED HE SHALL BE...
NOW!
YOUR WORD CAN NO LONGER BE RELIED UPON, MENTUS! WE WILL DEAL WITH THESE SPACEKNIGHTS IN OUR OWN FASHION!
IN A HORRIBLE TRANSFORMATION, THE SHAPE-CHANGING DIRE WRAITHS TAKE ON THE APPEARANCE OF SOME OF THE MOST LOATHSOMELY LETHAL CREATURES IN THEIR DREADED DARK NEBULA!
FIGHT BESIDE THE WRAITHS, TERMINATOR!
BUT... WHERE ARE YOU GOING, MENTUS?
TO ENSURE VICTORY, DOLT! TO HASTEN GALADOR'S APPROACH TO THE DARK NEBULA! DELAY THE SPACEKNIGHTS!
SUCH IS MY WILL! OBEY!
17

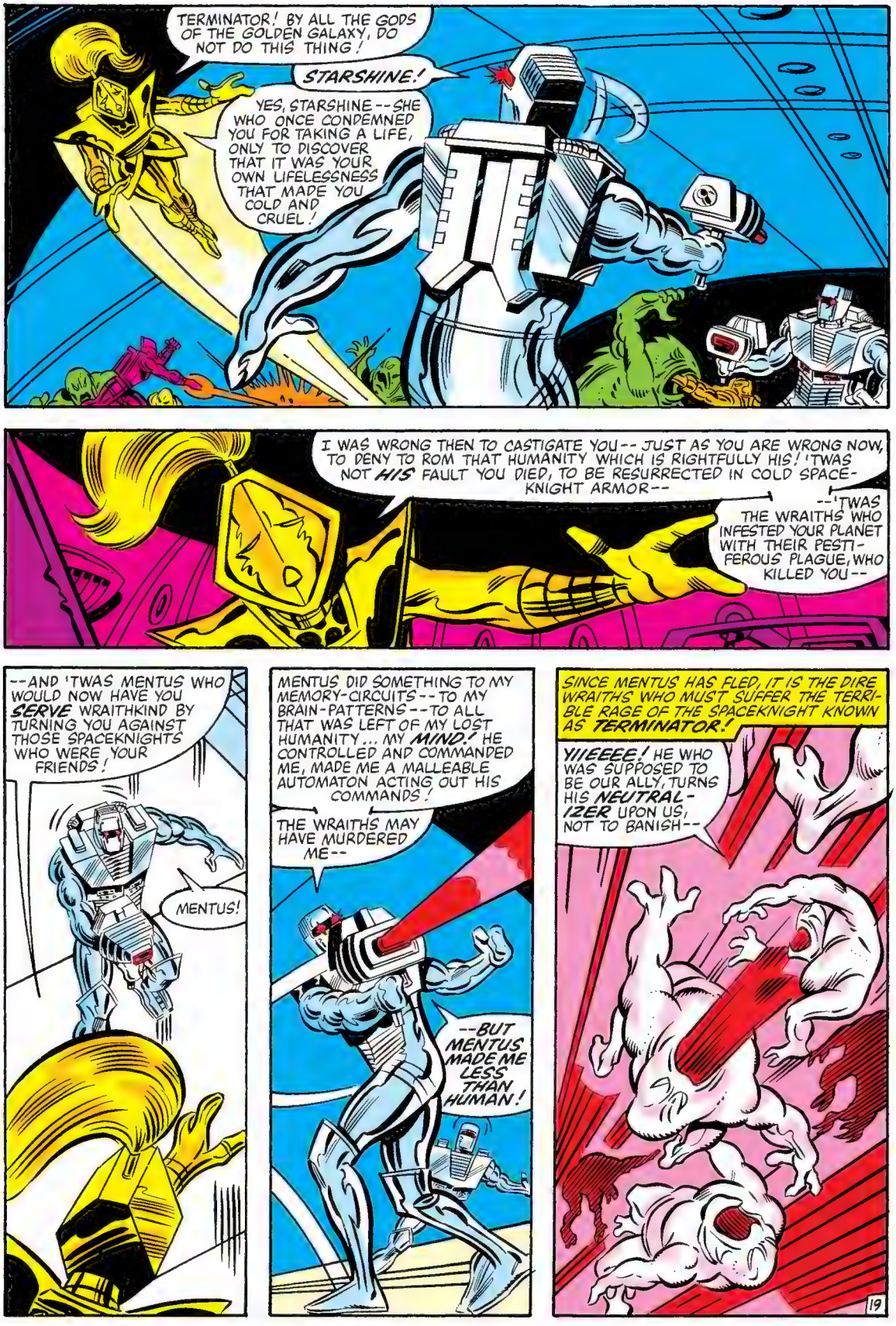

FOR THE BETTER PART OF TWO CENTURIES I HAVE DONE MENTUS'S BIDDING--BUT ALWAYS WAS HE THERE TO COMMAND ME, TO DISPEL THE DOUBTS THAT HAUNTED MY MEMORY-CIRCUITS LIKE DARK DREAMS...
NOW MENTUS HAS FLED, TERMINATOR, LEAVING YOU TO FACE YOUR FORMER FELLOW SPACEKNIGHTS WITHOUT HIM TO TELL YOU WHAT TO DO.
TERMINATOR? TERMINATOR WAS A DEAD MAN!
I AM ROM! I LIVE! I FEEL! MENTUS TOLD ME THAT YOU WOULD ONE DAY COME TO TAKE THAT AWAY FROM ME!

I COME MERELY TO CLAIM THAT HUMANITY WHICH IS RIGHTFULLY MINE!
LEAVING ME A COLD, INHUMAN KILLING-MACHINE AGAIN? NO, SPACEKNIGHT! IF YOU WANT YOUR PRECIOUS HUMANITY, YOU MUST KILL ME TO GET IT!

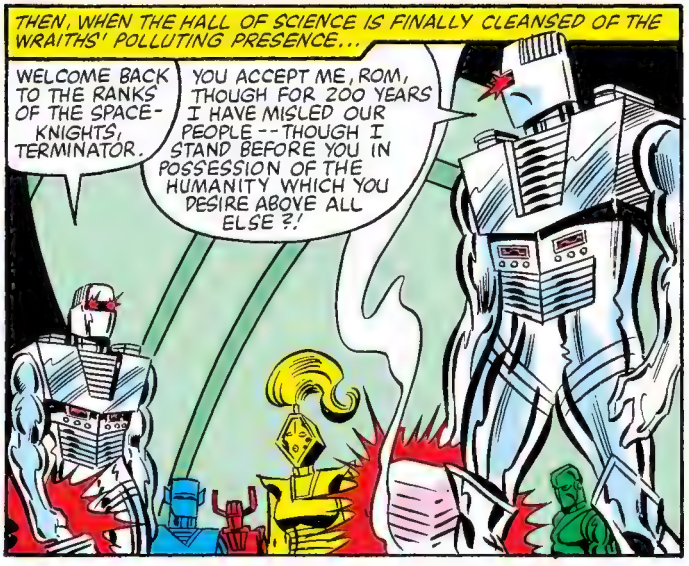

KILL YOU--? AYE, MY NEUTRALIZER COULD EASILY NEUTRALIZE YOUR LIFE-FORCE... BUT I WOULD ONLY BE KILLING MYSELF!

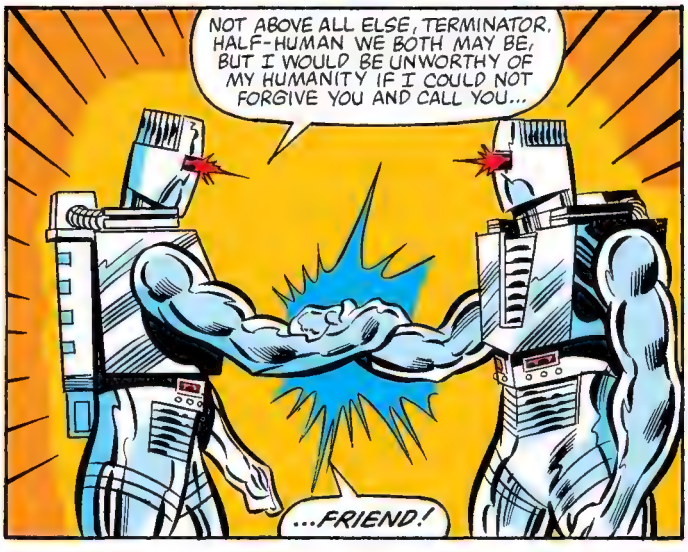

AND, IF I WERE TO USE MY NEUTRALIZER TO SLAY YOU, I WOULD DESTROY THOSE VERY HUMAN CELLS WHICH COULD MAKE ME WHOLE!

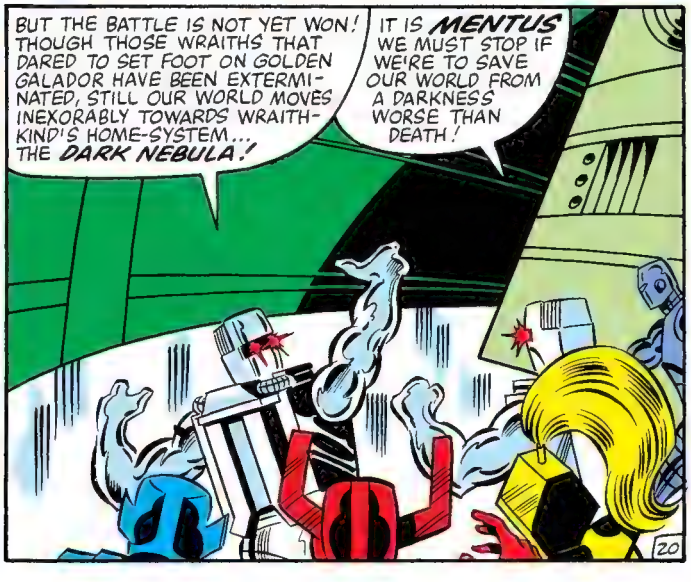

BUT, IF YOU WERE TO RECLAIM THAT WHICH MENTUS HAD ME STEAL FROM YOU, I WOULD REVERT TO MY FORMER, LIFELESS SELF!
NO! BETTER TO LIVE HALF-HUMAN THAN TO NOT BE HUMAN AT ALL!
DIE, ROM!
18

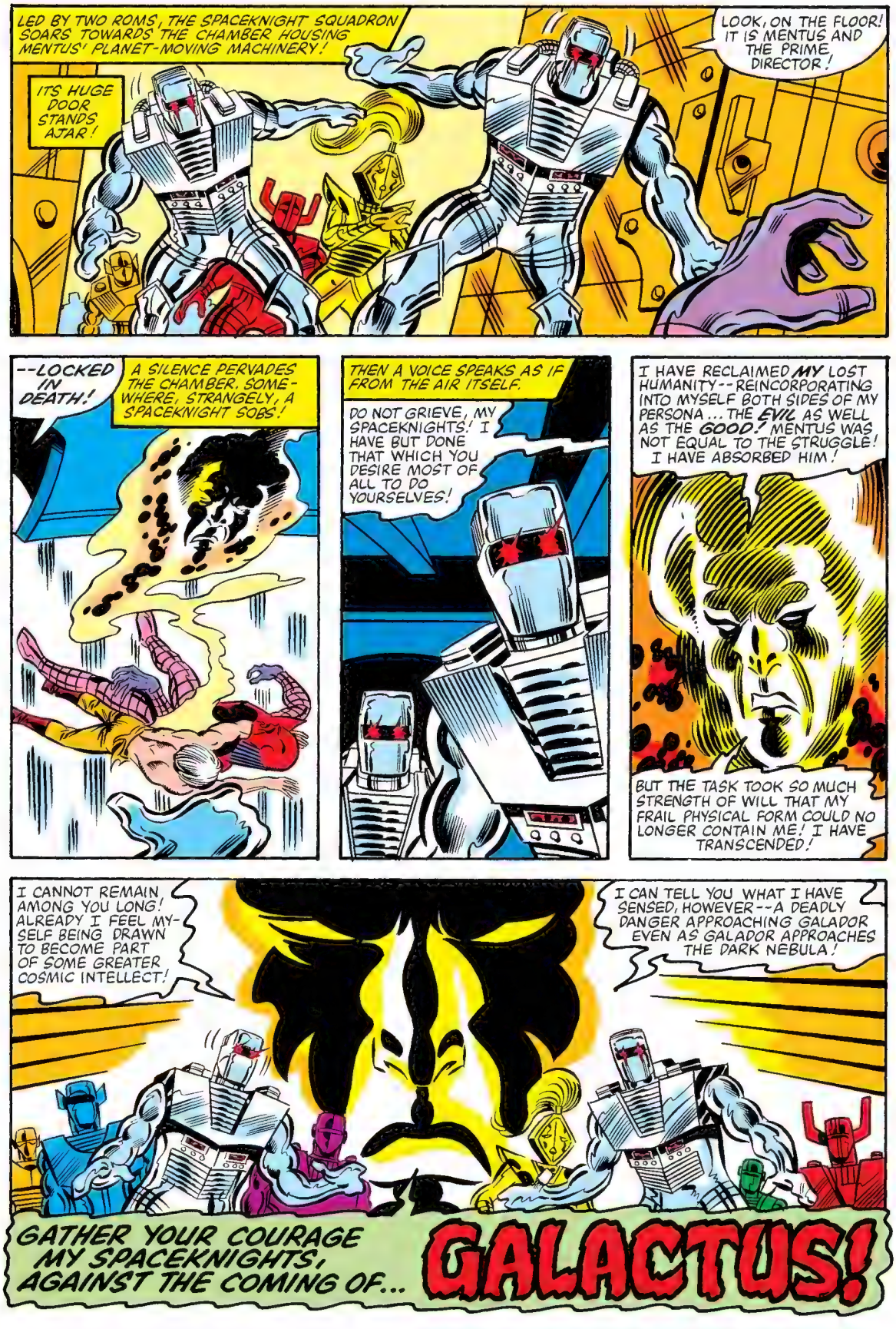

TERMINATOR! BY ALL THE GODS OF THE GOLDEN GALAXY, DO NOT DO THIS THING!
STARSHINE!
YES, STARSHINE--SHE WHO ONCE CONDEMNED YOU FOR TAKING A LIFE, ONLY TO DISCOVER THAT IT WAS YOUR OWN LIFELESSNESS THAT MADE YOU COLD AND CRUEL!
I WAS WRONG THEN TO CASTIGATE YOU--JUST AS YOU ARE WRONG NOW, TO DENY TO ROM THAT HUMANITY WHICH IS RIGHTFULLY HIS! 'TWAS NOT HIS FAULT YOU DIED, TO BE RESURRECTED IN COLD SPACE-KNIGHT ARMOR--
--'TWAS THE WRAITHS WHO INFESTED YOUR PLANET WITH THEIR PESTI-FEROUS PLAGUE, WHO KILLED YOU--
--AND 'TWAS MENTUS WHO WOULD NOW HAVE YOU SERVE WRAITHKIND BY TURNING YOU AGAINST THOSE SPACEKNIGHTS WHO WERE YOUR FRIENDS!
MENTUS!
MENTUS DID SOMETHING TO MY MEMORY-CIRCUITS--TO MY BRAIN-PATTERNS--TO ALL THAT WAS LEFT OF MY LOST HUMANITY... MY MIND! HE CONTROLLED AND COMMANDED ME, MADE ME A MALLEABLE AUTOMATON ACTING OUT HIS COMMANDS!
THE WRAITHS MAY HAVE MURDERED ME--
--BUT MENTUS MADE ME LESS THAN HUMAN!
SINCE MENTUS HAS FLED, IT IS THE DIRE WRAITHS WHO MUST SUFFER THE TERRIBLE RAGE OF THE SPACEKNIGHT KNOWN AS TERMINATOR!
YIIEEEE! HE WHO WAS SUPPOSED TO BE OUR ALLY, TURNS HIS NEUTRALIZER UPON US, NOT TO BANISH--
19

--BUT TO KILL!
BEYOND LIMBO THERE IS SAID TO BE A PLACE OF ETERNAL FIRE! IT IS TO THAT PURGATORY THAT TERMINATOR HAS DISPATCHED THE DIRE WRAITHS!


THEN, WHEN THE HALL OF SCIENCE IS FINALLY CLEANSED OF THE WRAITHS' POLLUTING PRESENCE...
WELCOME BACK TO THE RANKS OF THE SPACE-KNIGHTS, TERMINATOR.
YOU ACCEPT ME, ROM, THOUGH FOR 200 YEARS I HAVE MISLED OUR PEOPLE--THOUGH I STAND BEFORE YOU IN POSSESSION OF THE HUMANITY WHICH YOU DESIRE ABOVE ALL ELSE?!

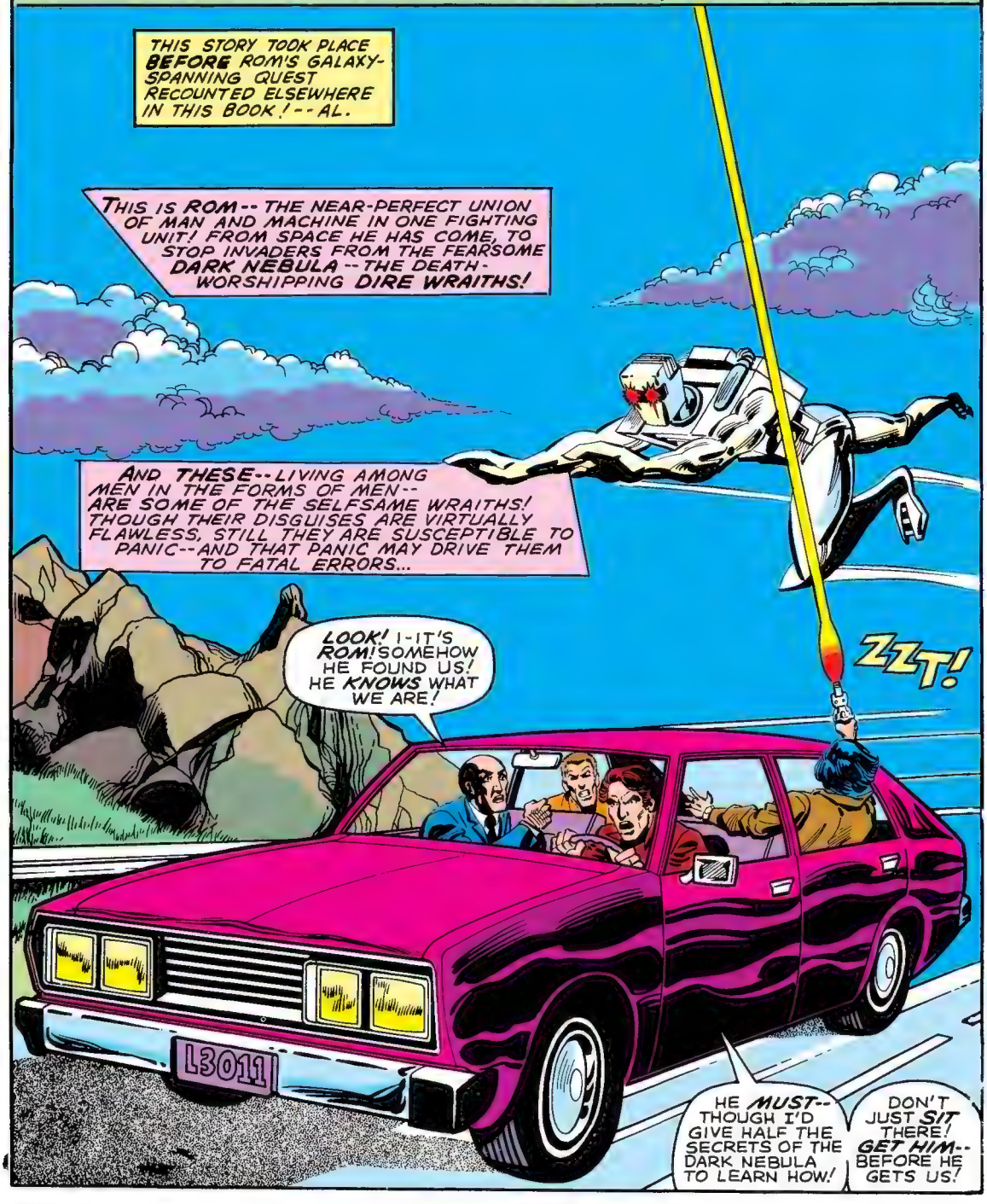

NOT ABOVE ALL ELSE, TERMINATOR, HALF-HUMAN WE BOTH MAY BE, BUT I WOULD BE UNWORTHY OF MY HUMANITY IF I COULD NOT FORGIVE YOU AND CALL YOU...
...FRIEND!

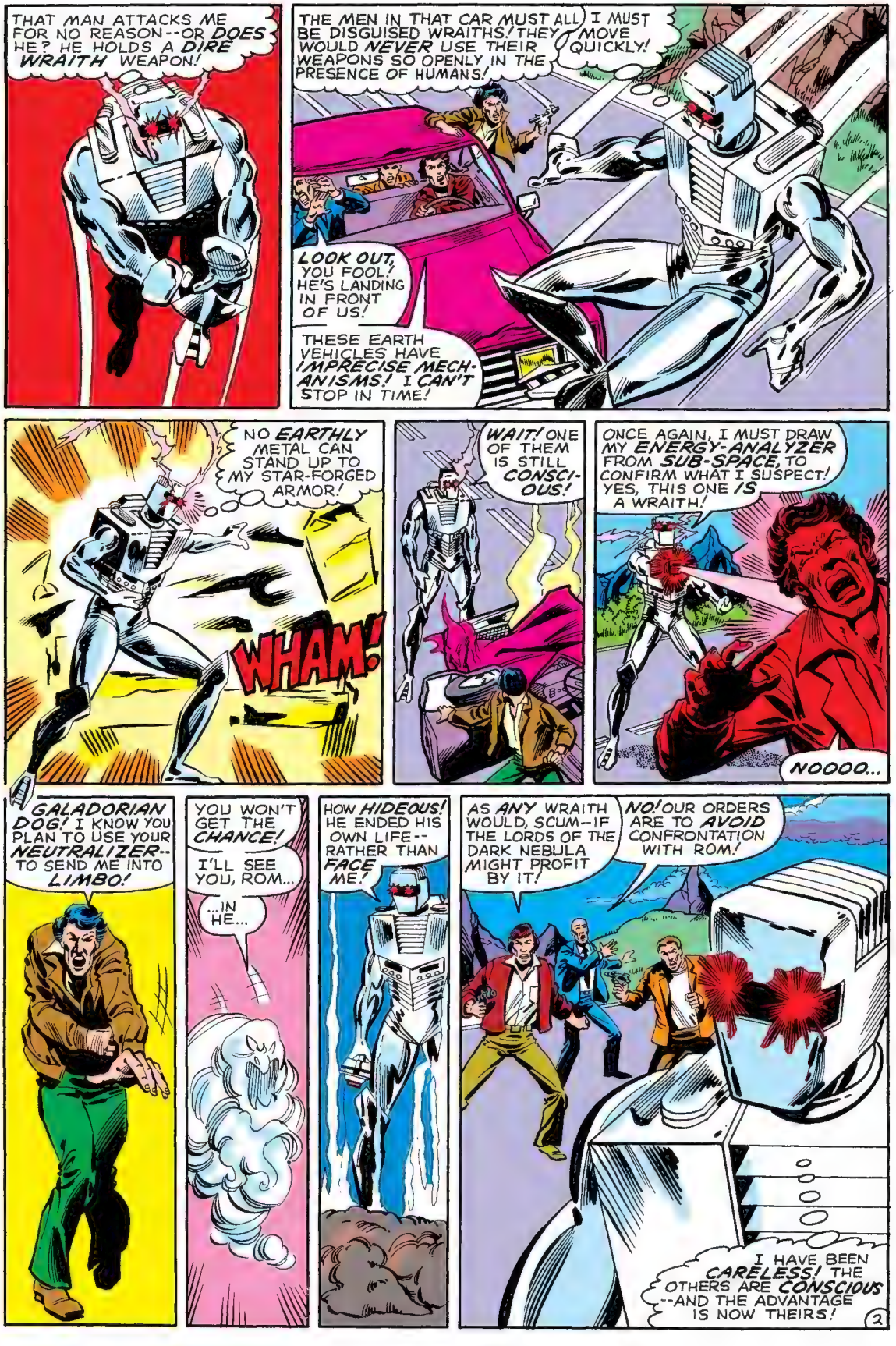

BUT THE BATTLE IS NOT YET WON! THOUGH THOSE WRAITHS THAT DARED TO SET FOOT ON GOLDEN GALADOR HAVE BEEN EXTERMINATED, STILL OUR WORLD MOVES INEXORABLY TOWARDS WRAITH-KIND'S HOME-SYSTEM... THE DARK NEBULA!
IT IS MENTUS WE MUST STOP IF WE'RE TO SAVE OUR WORLD FROM A DARKNESS WORSE THAN DEATH!
20


LED BY TWO ROMS, THE SPACEKNIGHT SQUADRON SOARS TOWARDS THE CHAMBER HOUSING MENTUS' PLANET-MOVING MACHINERY!
ITS HUGE DOOR STANDS AJAR!
LOOK, ON THE FLOOR! IT IS MENTUS AND THE PRIME DIRECTOR!
--LOCKED IN DEATH!
A SILENCE PERVADES THE CHAMBER. SOMEWHERE, STRANGELY, A SPACEKNIGHT SOBS!
THEN A VOICE SPEAKS AS IF FROM THE AIR ITSELF.
DO NOT GRIEVE, MY SPACEKNIGHTS! I HAVE BUT DONE THAT WHICH YOU DESIRE MOST OF ALL TO DO YOURSELVES!
I HAVE RECLAIMED MY LOST HUMANITY--REINCORPORATING INTO MYSELF BOTH SIDES OF MY PERSONA... THE EVIL AS WELL AS THE GOOD! MENTUS WAS NOT EQUAL TO THE STRUGGLE! I HAVE ABSORBED HIM!
BUT THE TASK TOOK SO MUCH STRENGTH OF WILL THAT MY FRAIL PHYSICAL FORM COULD NO LONGER CONTAIN ME! I HAVE TRANSCENDED!
I CANNOT REMAIN AMONG YOU LONG! ALREADY I FEEL MYSELF BEING DRAWN TO BECOME PART OF SOME GREATER COSMIC INTELLECT!
I CAN TELL YOU WHAT I HAVE SENSED, HOWEVER--A DEADLY DANGER APPROACHING GALADOR EVEN AS GALADOR APPROACHES THE DARK NEBULA!
GATHER YOUR COURAGE MY SPACEKNIGHTS, AGAINST THE COMING OF... GALACTUS!

LOVE WILL TEAR US APART

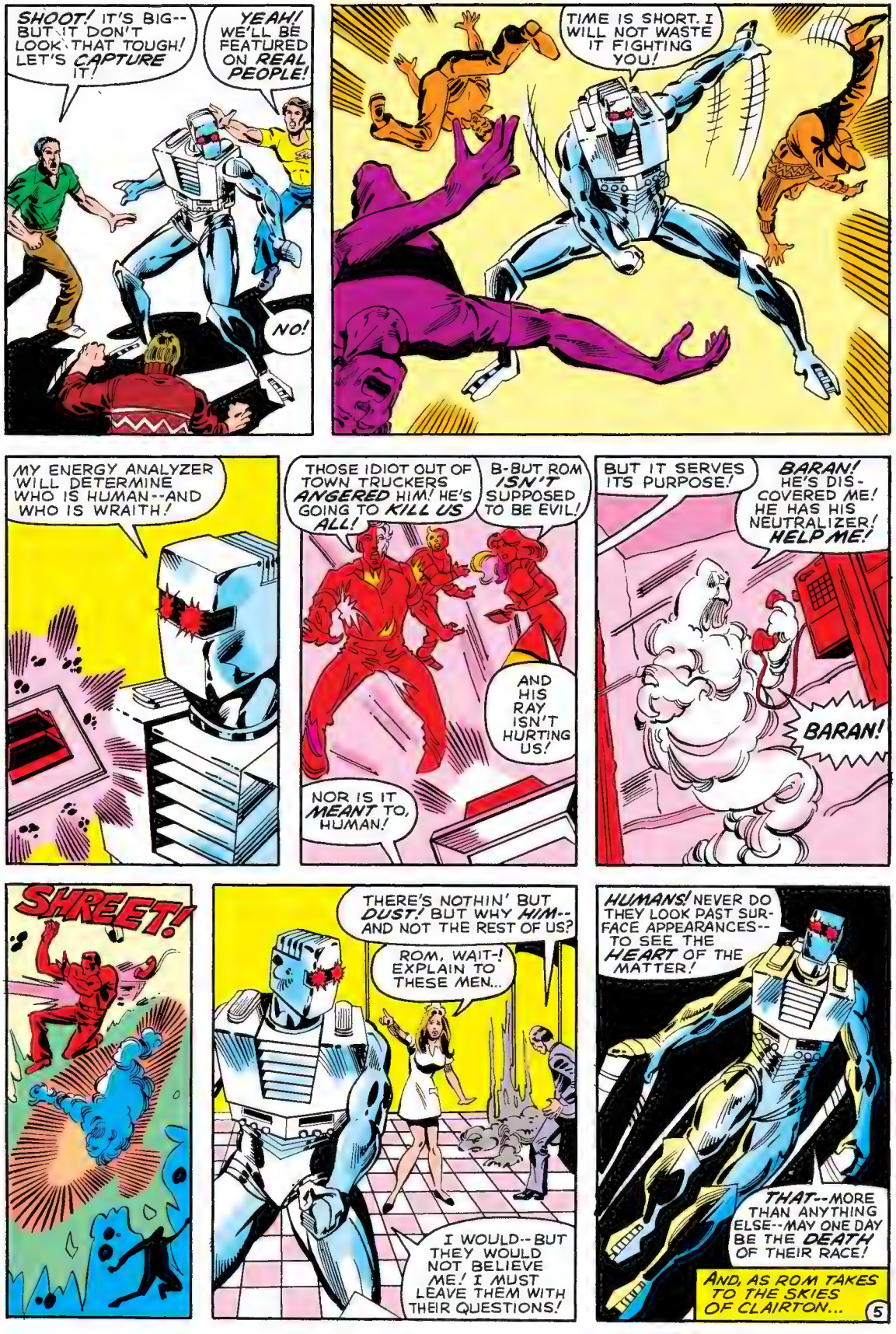
STEVEN GRANT SCRIPT | GREG LAROCQUE PENCILS | STEVE MITCHELL INKS | DIANA ALBERS LETTERING | BEN SEAN COLORING | AL MILGROM & MARY JO DUFFY EDITING | JIM SHOOTER GNASHING OF TEETH


THIS STORY TOOK PLACE BEFORE ROM'S GALAXY-SPANNING QUEST RECOUNTED ELSEWHERE IN THIS BOOK!--AL.
THIS IS ROM--THE NEAR-PERFECT UNION OF MAN AND MACHINE IN ONE FIGHTING UNIT! FROM SPACE HE HAS COME, TO STOP INVADERS FROM THE FEARSOME DARK NEBULA--THE DEATH-WORSHIPPING DIRE WRAITHS!
AND THESE--LIVING AMONG MEN IN THE FORMS OF MEN--ARE SOME OF THE SELFSAME WRAITHS! THOUGH THEIR DISGUISES ARE VIRTUALLY FLAWLESS, STILL THEY ARE SUSCEPTIBLE TO PANIC--AND THAT PANIC MAY DRIVE THEM TO FATAL ERRORS...
LOOK! I-IT'S ROM! SOMEHOW HE FOUND US! HE KNOWS WHAT WE ARE!
ZZT!
L3011
HE MUST--THOUGH I'D GIVE HALF THE SECRETS OF THE DARK NEBULA TO LEARN HOW!
DON'T JUST SIT THERE! GET HIM--BEFORE HE GETS US!

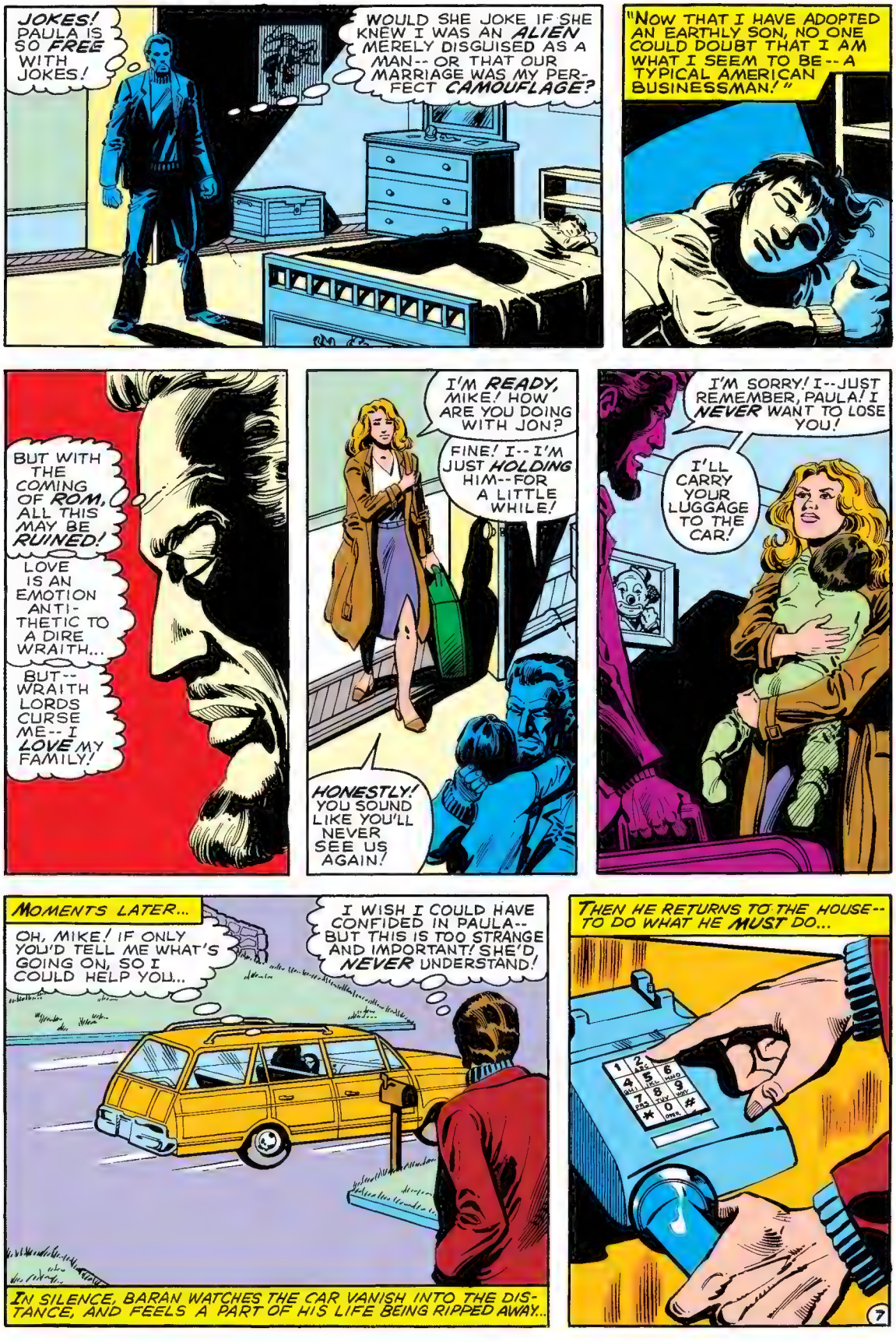

THAT MAN ATTACKS ME FOR NO REASON--OR DOES HE? HE HOLDS A DIRE WRAITH WEAPON!
THE MEN IN THAT CAR MUST ALL BE DISGUISED WRAITHS! THEY WOULD NEVER USE THEIR WEAPONS SO OPENLY IN THE PRESENCE OF HUMANS!
I MUST MOVE QUICKLY!
LOOK OUT, YOU FOOL! HE'S LANDING IN FRONT OF US!
THESE EARTH VEHICLES HAVE IMPRECISE MECHANISMS! I CAN'T STOP IN TIME!
NO EARTHLY METAL CAN STAND UP TO MY STAR-FORGED ARMOR!
WHAM!
WAIT! ONE OF THEM IS STILL CONSCIOUS!
ONCE AGAIN, I MUST DRAW MY ENERGY-ANALYZER FROM SUB-SPACE, TO CONFIRM WHAT I SUSPECT! YES, THIS ONE IS A WRAITH!
NOOOO...
GALADORIAN DOG! I KNOW YOU PLAN TO USE YOUR NEUTRALIZER-- TO SEND ME INTO LIMBO!
YOU WON'T GET THE CHANCE!
I'LL SEE YOU, ROM...
...IN HE...
HOW HIDEOUS! HE ENDED HIS OWN LIFE-- RATHER THAN FACE ME!
AS ANY WRAITH WOULD, SCUM--IF THE LORDS OF THE DARK NEBULA MIGHT PROFIT BY IT!
NO! OUR ORDERS ARE TO AVOID CONFRONTATION WITH ROM!
I HAVE BEEN CARELESS! THE OTHERS ARE CONSCIOUS --AND THE ADVANTAGE IS NOW THEIRS!
2

THESE POLARIZING RAYS WERE CREATED JUST TO STOP YOU, SPACEKNIGHT!
MAGNETISM! MY METALLIC PARTS WILL BE DRAWN TO EACH OTHER-- CRUSHING THE HUMAN ORGANS WITHIN MY CYBORG SHELL!
THE FOOLS! THEIR WEAPONS AREN'T ENOUGH TO STOP ROM!
LET THEM DIVERT ROM'S ATTENTION FOR A FEW MOMENTS! I WILL TAKE ON ANOTHER FORM--AND ESCAPE!
MEANWHILE...
THEY THOUGHT, WHEN THEY SAW MY KNEES BUCKLE, THAT I WAS FINISHED!
BUT IT WAS A RUSE SO I COULD FALL BENEATH THE PATHS OF THEIR BEAMS! NOW I CAN USE MY NEUTRALIZER--
--AND CONSIGN THE WRAITHS TO LIMBO--FOREVER!
ARGH! HIS RAY BLAST TEARS ME FROM THIS HUMAN GUISE!
I'M FALLING-- INTO CURSED LIMBO!
HELLLPPP MMMEEEE...
BE THANKFUL THAT MY RACE CHERISHES ALL LIFE, WRAITH--OR YOU WOULD CERTAINLY BE EXECUTED, RATHER THAN MERELY IMPRISONED OUTSIDE OF TIME AND SPACE!
YOU WON'T BANISH ME, PIG...
3

WON'T I? IN LIMBO, REFLECT ON YOUR CRIMES--AND ASK YOURSELF IF THIS PUNISHMENT WAS NOT MERCIFUL!
ARH! ONE DAY, ROM, YOU WILL FALL TO THE WRAITH LORDS! THE GATES OF LIMBO WILL BE OPENED...
...AND I...
...WILL DANCE...
...ON YOUR GRAAAVE...
IT IS OVER!
BUT WAIT! THERE WERE FOUR WRAITHS--AND I DISPATCHED ONLY THREE! WHERE--?
THERE! DURING THE BATTLE, I BARELY NOTICED--HE ASSUMED THE SHAPE OF A BIRD, AND FLED!
IT IS AN EASY MATTER TO TRACK THE WRAITH! HE HAS POSTPONED HIS FATE--NOT ESCAPED IT!
UNAWARE THAT HE IS BEING FOLLOWED, THE BIRD-WRAITH FLIES FOR MILES, UNTIL HE REACHES THE OUTSKIRTS OF CLAIRTON, WEST VIRGINIA...
A TRUCK-STOP! THAT WILL DO!
IN THE GUISE OF A TRUCK DRIVER I WILL BE ABLE TO MOVE WITHOUT AROUSING SUSPICION!
THE OTHERS MUST BE NOTIFIED THAT OUR POLARIZERS WERE PARTIALLY EFFECTIVE AGAINST ROM!
HUMAN FOOLS! THEY MINDLESSLY ENJOY THEMSELVES, WHILE DOOM HOVERS OVER THEM!
AH! THERE ARE THE TELEPHONES--AT THE BACK OF THE RESTAURANT!
MOMENTS LATER...
COMMANDER BARAN! THIS IS GORTON! I KNOW THIS ISN'T AN AUTHORIZED REPORT UNIT!
APA
GATHER THE REMAINING SECTION MEMBERS TOGETHER FOR A WAR COUNCIL! WE'RE UNDER ATTACK BY--
OH, NO! ROM!
DO NOT BE ALARMED, HUMANS! I DO NOT WISH TO HARM YOU!
THERE IS ONE AMONG YOU WHO IS DANGEROUS!
ROSE
IT'S ROM!
WHAT'S A ROM?!
4

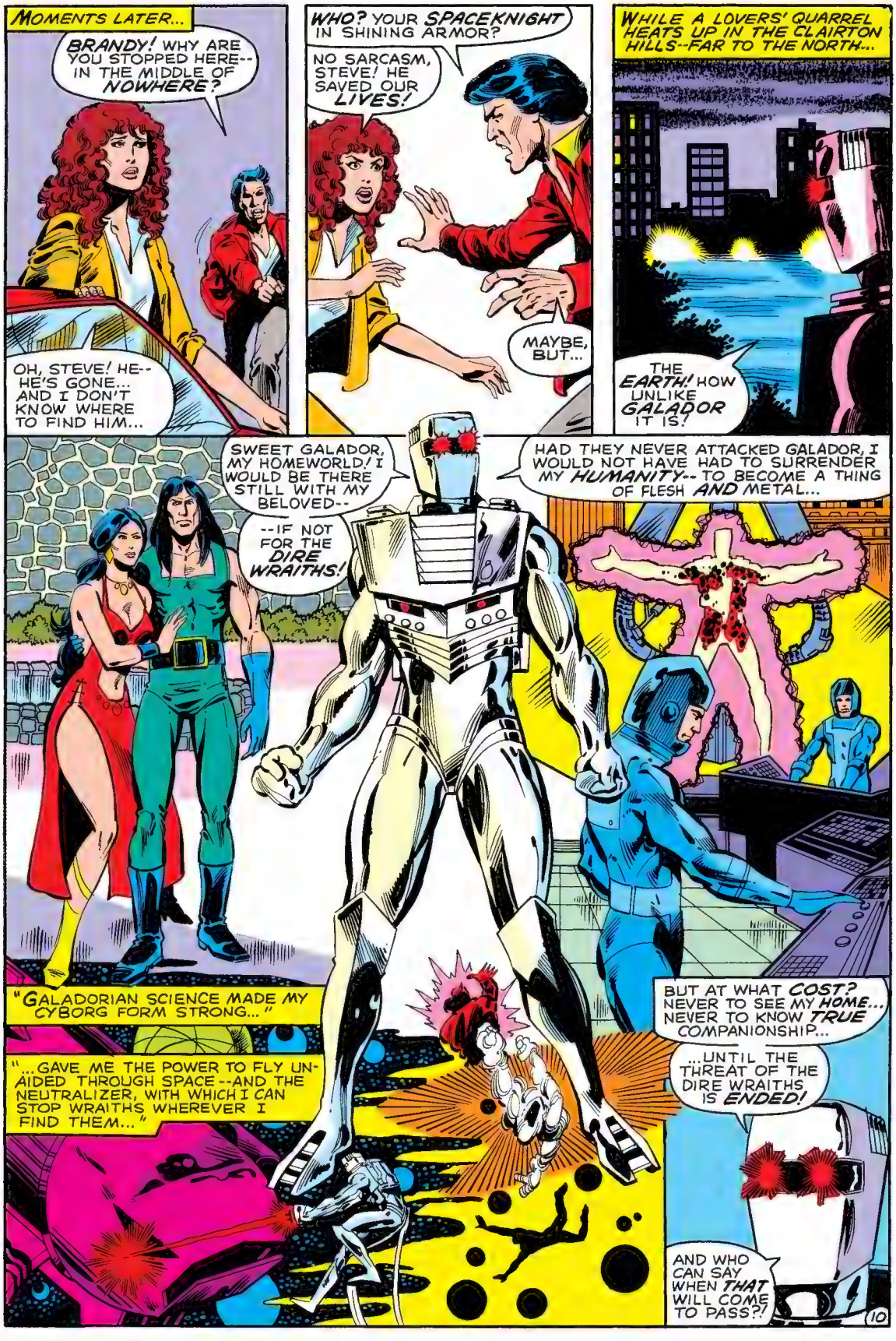

SHOOT! IT'S BIG--BUT IT DON'T LOOK THAT TOUGH! LET'S CAPTURE IT!
YEAH! WE'LL BE FEATURED ON REAL PEOPLE!
NO!
TIME IS SHORT. I WILL NOT WASTE IT FIGHTING YOU!
MY ENERGY ANALYZER WILL DETERMINE WHO IS HUMAN--AND WHO IS WRAITH!
THOSE IDIOT OUT OF TOWN TRUCKERS ANGERED HIM! HE'S GOING TO KILL US ALL!
B-BUT ROM ISN'T SUPPOSED TO BE EVIL!
AND HIS RAY ISN'T HURTING US!
NOR IS IT MEANT TO, HUMAN!
BUT IT SERVES ITS PURPOSE!
BARAN! HE'S DISCOVERED ME! HE HAS HIS NEUTRALIZER! HELP ME!
BARAN!
SHREET!
THERE'S NOTHIN' BUT DUST! BUT WHY HIM--AND NOT THE REST OF US?
ROM, WAIT-! EXPLAIN TO THESE MEN...
I WOULD--BUT THEY WOULD NOT BELIEVE ME! I MUST LEAVE THEM WITH THEIR QUESTIONS!
HUMANS! NEVER DO THEY LOOK PAST SURFACE APPEARANCES--TO SEE THE HEART OF THE MATTER!
THAT--MORE THAN ANYTHING ELSE--MAY ONE DAY BE THE DEATH OF THEIR RACE!
AND, AS ROM TAKES TO THE SKIES OF CLAIRTON...
5

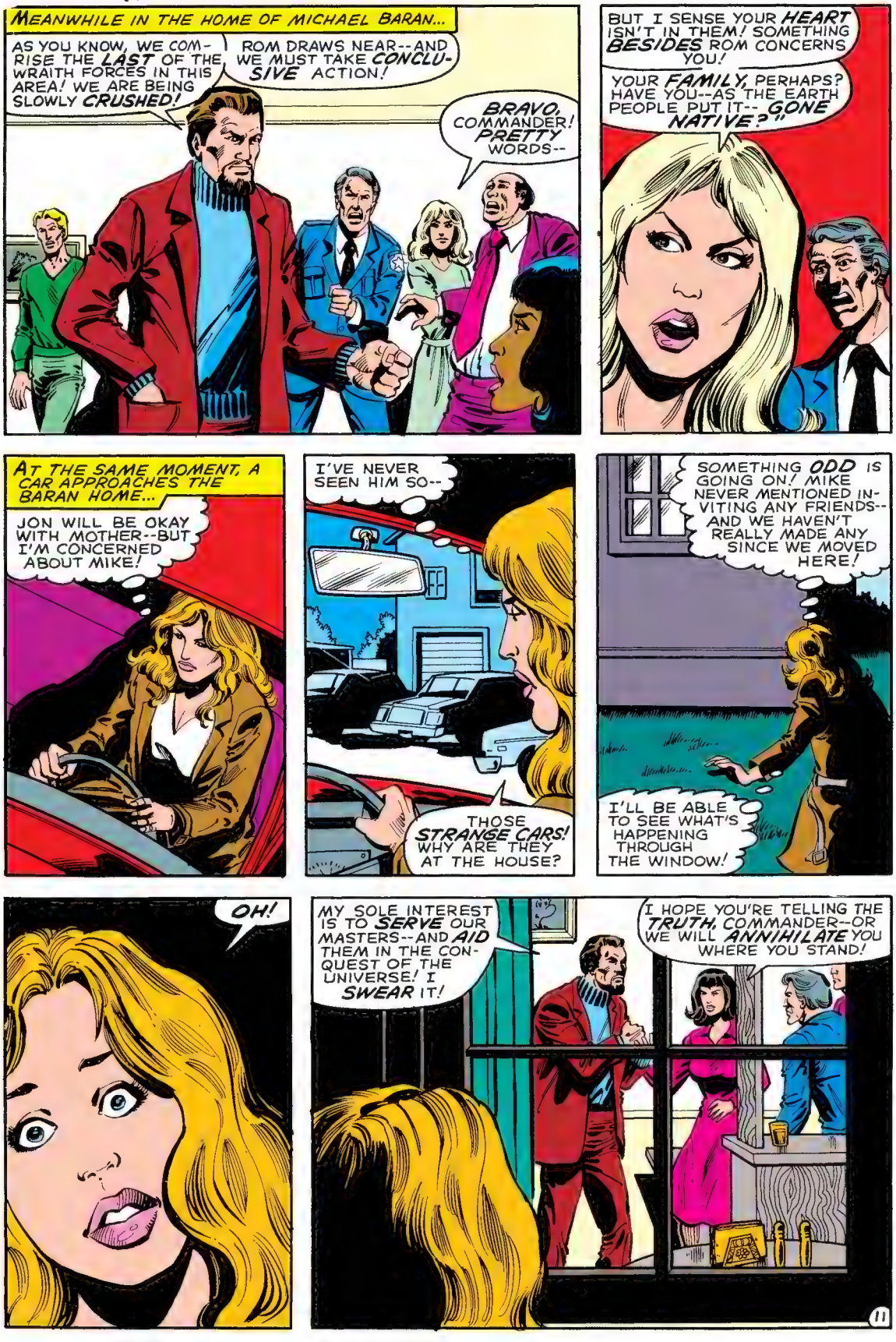
THE DIRE WRAITH NAMED MICHAEL BARAN PONDERS A NOW-DEAD PHONE LINE...
ROM! AGAIN! HOW I HATE THAT SPACE-KNIGHT!
HE HAS DE-CIMATED OUR OPERATIONS IN THIS AREA!
HE'S EVEN WON MOST OF THE LOCAL POPULACE OVER!
IT WON'T BE LONG NOW--UNTIL HE COMES FOR ME!
MICHAEL, YOU LOOK SO GRAVE, HONEY! DID THAT CALL BRING BAD NEWS?
NOTHING'S WRONG WITH THE BUSINESS, IS IT? YOU'VE WORKED SO HARD TO PUT BARAN LABS TOGETHER!
ERRR--YES, PAULA! SOMETHING'S COME UP WITH THE BUSINESS! I HAVE TO GO OUT OF TOWN FOR A FEW DAYS!
WHY DON'T YOU TAKE JON TO YOUR MOTHER'S WHILE I'M GONE?
MOTHER'S? MIKE, I'M YOUR WIFE!
ISN'T THERE SOME WAY I CAN HELP?
NOT THIS TIME! IT'S SOMETHING I SHOULD HANDLE ALONE!
NOW--UPSTAIRS WITH YOU AND GET PACKING! I'LL GET OUR SON READY!
OKAY, OKAY! YOU'RE JUST LUCKY I LIKE FORCEFUL MEN, MR. BARAN!
6


JOKES! PAULA IS SO FREE WITH JOKES!
WOULD SHE JOKE IF SHE KNEW I WAS AN ALIEN MERELY DISGUISED AS A MAN-- OR THAT OUR MARRIAGE WAS MY PERFECT CAMOUFLAGE?
"NOW THAT I HAVE ADOPTED AN EARTHLY SON, NO ONE COULD DOUBT THAT I AM WHAT I SEEM TO BE-- A TYPICAL AMERICAN BUSINESSMAN!"
BUT WITH THE COMING OF ROM, ALL THIS MAY BE RUINED!
LOVE IS AN EMOTION ANTI-THETIC TO A DIRE WRAITH...
BUT-- WRAITH LORDS CURSE ME-- I LOVE MY FAMILY!
I'M READY, MIKE! HOW ARE YOU DOING WITH JON?
FINE! I-- I'M JUST HOLDING HIM-- FOR A LITTLE WHILE!
HONESTLY! YOU SOUND LIKE YOU'LL NEVER SEE US AGAIN!
I'M SORRY! I-- JUST REMEMBER, PAULA! I NEVER WANT TO LOSE YOU!
I'LL CARRY YOUR LUGGAGE TO THE CAR!
MOMENTS LATER...
OH, MIKE! IF ONLY YOU'D TELL ME WHAT'S GOING ON, SO I COULD HELP YOU...
I WISH I COULD HAVE CONFIDED IN PAULA-- BUT THIS IS TOO STRANGE AND IMPORTANT! SHE'D NEVER UNDERSTAND!
IN SILENCE, BARAN WATCHES THE CAR VANISH INTO THE DISTANCE, AND FEELS A PART OF HIS LIFE BEING RIPPED AWAY...
THEN HE RETURNS TO THE HOUSE-- TO DO WHAT HE MUST DO...
7

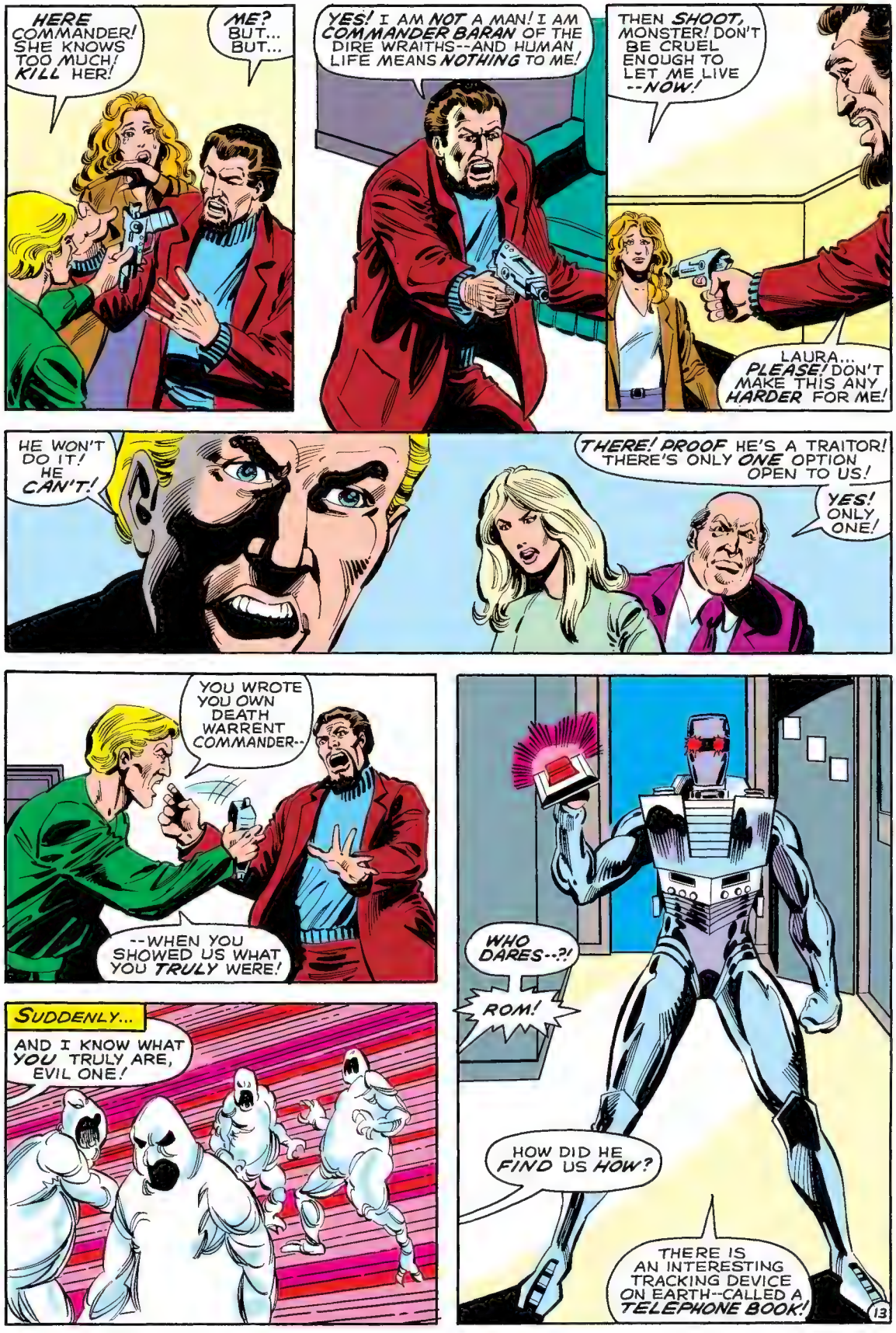
MEANWHILE, AT THE HOME OF ROM'S EARTHLY ALLY AND CLOSEST FRIEND...
BRANDY CLARK! ARE YOU THERE?
I'M HERE, ROM! WHAT HAPPENED? YOU WERE DUE BACK LONG AGO!
I WAS FLYING HERE ALONG THE BACK ROADS--AND CHANCED UPON SEVERAL DIRE WRAITHS! APPARENTLY, THEY ASSUMED I WAS CHASING THEM--AND WE FOUGHT!
I TAKE IT YOU WON?
I WORRY ABOUT YOU, ROM! THERE SEEM TO BE SO MANY DIRE WRAITHS...
CAN YOU--ALONE--DEFEAT THEM ALL?
I AM NOT ALONE! I HAVE YOU AND OTHERS TO HELP ME WITH MY WORK!
I WOULDN'T PUT TOO MUCH FAITH IN OTHERS, ROM!
BY THE WAY...
I DID THE RESEARCH YOU ASKED FOR--ON PEOPLE WITH SHADOWY PASTS WHO HAVE RECENTLY DEVELOPED PECULIAR, ADVANCED TECHNOLOGIES. THERE'S KARL JUDSON IN DALLAS ...PAUL ERNST IN RENO... MICHAEL BARAN IN READING, PENN--
BARAN! MY LAST FOE WENT TO LIMBO SCREAMING FOR A WRAITH CALLED BARAN!
SUDDENLY...
BRANDY! I THOUGHT I HEARD YOU OUT HERE?
WHY DON'T YOU BRING ROM INSIDE. WHERE NOBODY CAN... UH...SEE YOU TOGETHER.
8

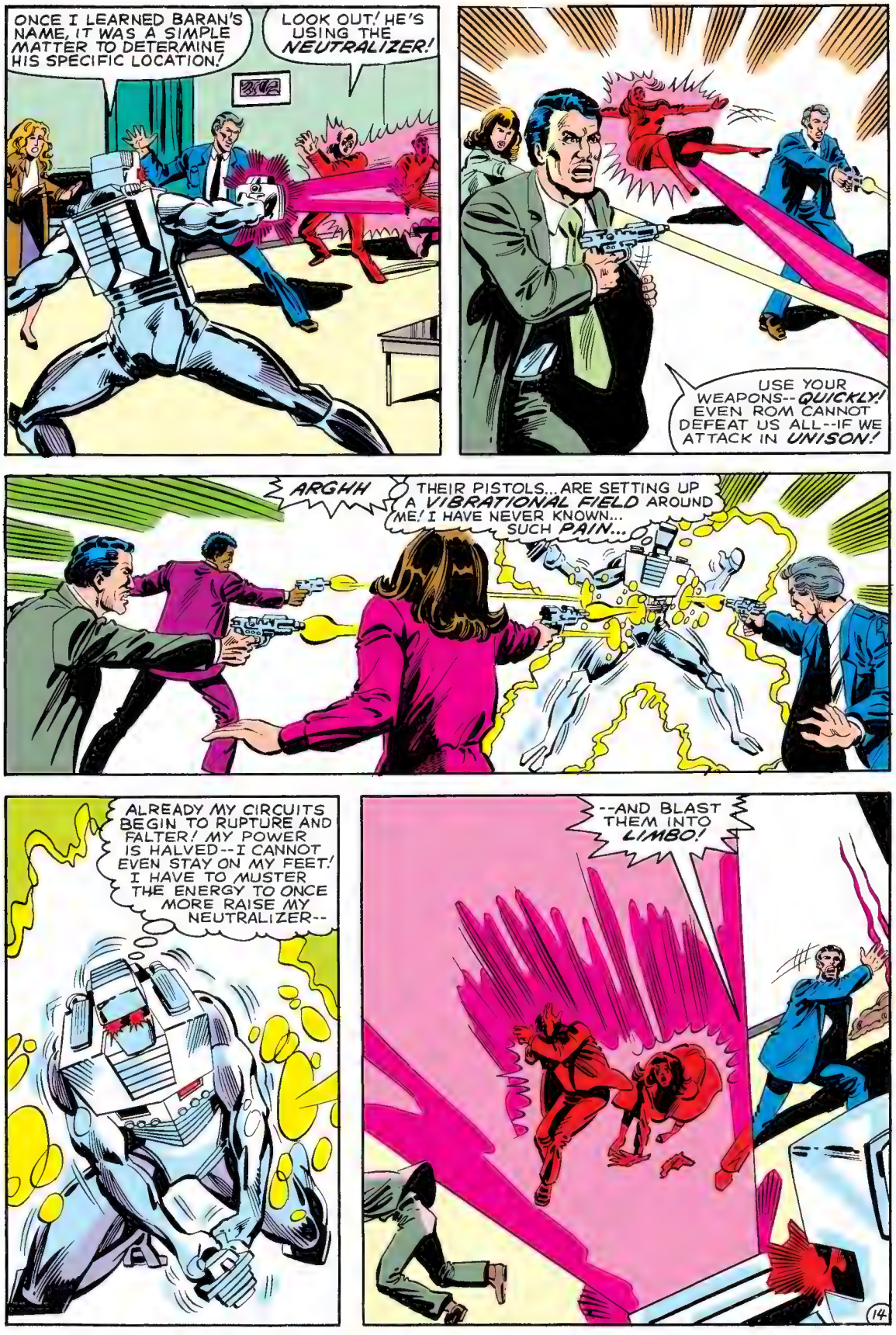
DAD! HOW CAN YOU TALK LIKE THAT? I'M NOT ASHAMED TO BE SEEN WITH HIM! ROM'S FIGHTING OUR FIGHT--AND HE NEEDS ALL THE HELP WE CAN GIVE HIM!
CAN'T SOMEONE ELSE HELP HIM FOR A CHANGE? YOUR MOTHER AND I WORRY OURSELVES SICK THAT YOU'LL END UP DEAD!
OR WORSE, IT WON'T BE YOU WHO COMES HOME AT ALL--BUT AN ALIEN, MADE TO LOOK LIKE YOU!
STOP!
I SEE THAT GREAT ANGUISH IS CAUSED, BECAUSE OF ME--AND I WILL NOT BREAK UP THIS FAMILY!
ROM! WAIT!
HE'S GONE, DAD! YOU GOT WHAT YOU WANTED! ARE YOU SATISFIED?
BRANDY! COME BACK HERE!
MAYBE I WILL--WHEN YOU LEARN TO UNDERSTAND!
AS BRANDY'S CAR PULLS AWAY...
WHY WON'T SHE LISTEN, SARA? WHY?
SHE'S AS HEADSTRONG AS YOU, JOHN--AND SHE'S NOT OUR LITTLE GIRL ANYMORE! AND YOU KNOW WE DO OWE ROM A GREAT DEAL! -- WITHOUT HIM, HERE, PROTECTING US FROM THE DIRE WRAITHS--
--WE MIGHT ALL BE DEAD BY NOW!
I--I KNOW! BUT I STILL CAN'T HELP BUT WORRY ABOUT BRANDY!
MEANWHILE...
BRANDY! HOLD IT! IT'S ME-- STEVE!
NUTS!
I COULD'VE SWORN SHE HEARD ME! IS SHE IGNORING ME? I'LL HAVE TO CATCH HER!
I'M THE GUY WHO LOVES YOU, BRANDY CLARK--AND, WHETHER YOU LIKE IT OR NOT, WE'RE GOING TO TALK!
9

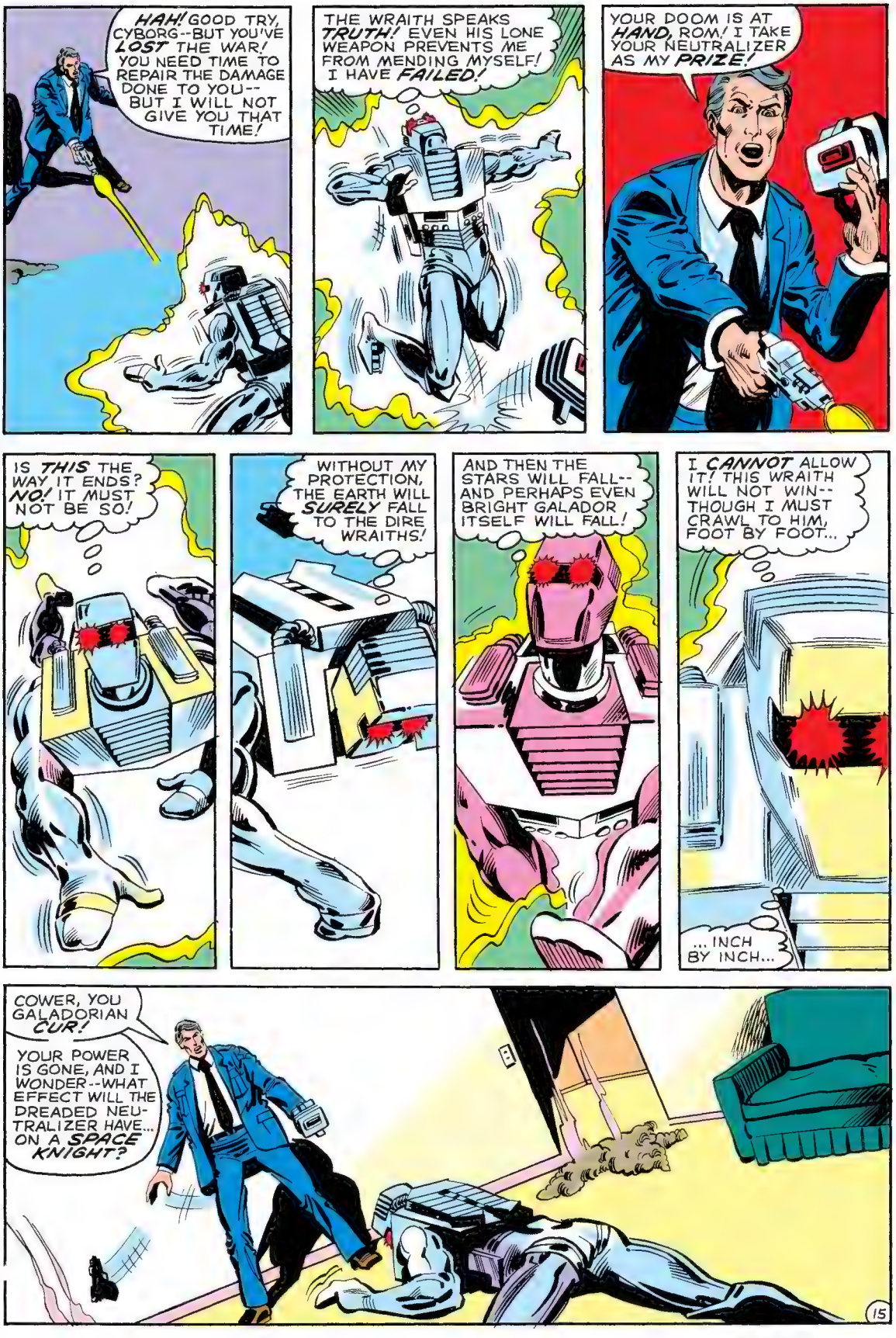

MOMENTS LATER...
BRANDY! WHY ARE YOU STOPPED HERE--IN THE MIDDLE OF NOWHERE?
OH, STEVE! HE--HE'S GONE... AND I DON'T KNOW WHERE TO FIND HIM...
WHO? YOUR SPACEKNIGHT IN SHINING ARMOR?
NO SARCASM, STEVE! HE SAVED OUR LIVES!
MAYBE, BUT...
WHILE A LOVERS' QUARREL HEATS UP IN THE CLAIRTON HILLS--FAR TO THE NORTH...
THE EARTH! HOW UNLIKE GALADOR IT IS!
SWEET GALADOR, MY HOMEWORLD! I WOULD BE THERE STILL WITH MY BELOVED--
--IF NOT FOR THE DIRE WRAITHS!
HAD THEY NEVER ATTACKED GALADOR, I WOULD NOT HAVE HAD TO SURRENDER MY HUMANITY-- TO BECOME A THING OF FLESH AND METAL...
"GALADORIAN SCIENCE MADE MY CYBORG FORM STRONG..."
"...GAVE ME THE POWER TO FLY UNAIDED THROUGH SPACE--AND THE NEUTRALIZER, WITH WHICH I CAN STOP WRAITHS WHEREVER I FIND THEM..."
BUT AT WHAT COST? NEVER TO SEE MY HOME... NEVER TO KNOW TRUE COMPANIONSHIP...
...UNTIL THE THREAT OF THE DIRE WRAITHS IS ENDED!
AND WHO CAN SAY WHEN THAT WILL COME TO PASS?!
10


MEANWHILE IN THE HOME OF MICHAEL BARAN...
AS YOU KNOW, WE COMPRISE THE LAST OF THE WRAITH FORCES IN THIS AREA! WE ARE BEING SLOWLY CRUSHED!
ROM DRAWS NEAR--AND WE MUST TAKE CONCLUSIVE ACTION!
BRAVO, COMMANDER! PRETTY WORDS--
BUT I SENSE YOUR HEART ISN'T IN THEM! SOMETHING BESIDES ROM CONCERNS YOU!
YOUR FAMILY, PERHAPS? HAVE YOU--AS THE EARTH PEOPLE PUT IT-- GONE NATIVE?"
AT THE SAME MOMENT, A CAR APPROACHES THE BARAN HOME...
JON WILL BE OKAY WITH MOTHER--BUT I'M CONCERNED ABOUT MIKE!
I'VE NEVER SEEN HIM SO--
THOSE STRANGE CARS! WHY ARE THEY AT THE HOUSE?
SOMETHING ODD IS GOING ON! MIKE NEVER MENTIONED INVITING ANY FRIENDS--AND WE HAVEN'T REALLY MADE ANY SINCE WE MOVED HERE!
I'LL BE ABLE TO SEE WHAT'S HAPPENING THROUGH THE WINDOW!
OH!
MY SOLE INTEREST IS TO SERVE OUR MASTERS--AND AID THEM IN THE CONQUEST OF THE UNIVERSE! I SWEAR IT!
I HOPE YOU'RE TELLING THE TRUTH, COMMANDER--OR WE WILL ANNIHILATE YOU WHERE YOU STAND!
11

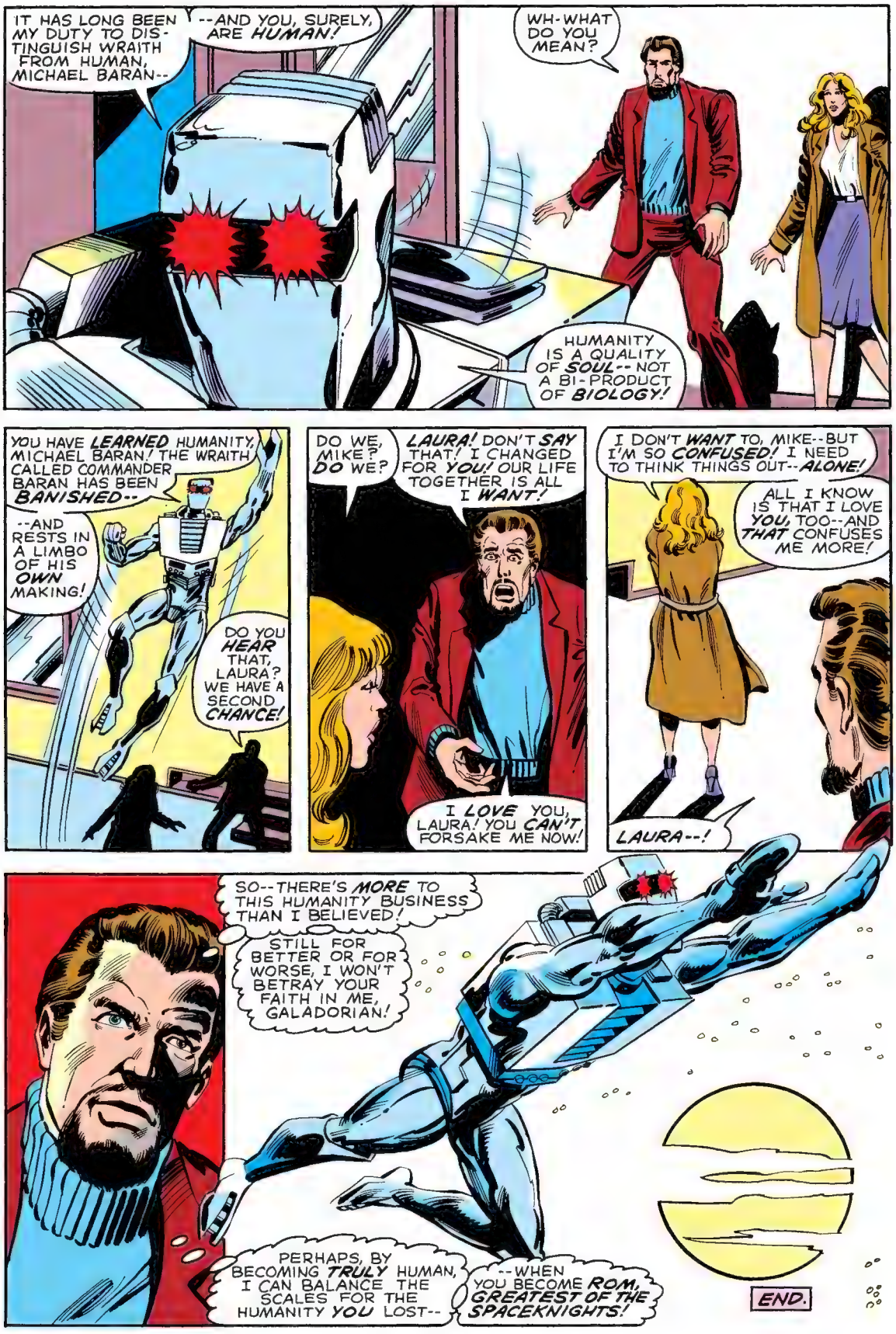
YOUR RECORDS SHOWS LESS THAN SINGLE-MINDED DEVOTION TO THE CAUSE, COMMANDER! YOU'VE EVEN AIDED AND ADVANCED THIS PLANET'S TECHNOLOGY!
TH-THEY'RE TALKING LIKE MIKE IS FROM OUTER SPACE OR SOMETHING!
A SPY! WHAT HAVE YOU HEARD, WITCH?
OHHH! NOTHING-- I HEARD NOTHING! PLEASE, LET ME GO!
SECONDS LATER...
LOOK WHAT I FOUND SNOOPING! OUTSIDE!
LAURA!
MIKE! SAY IT'S NOT TRUE! TELL ME YOU AREN'T SOME ALIEN INVADER!
I... I...
HEAVEN HELP ME, LAURA--I AM!
CALLING ON HEAVEN, COMMANDER?
BY THE WRAITH LORDS! HE'S FURTHER GONE THAN WE SUSPECTED!
PERHAPS HE'LL YET HAVE A CHANCE TO PROVE HIMSELF!
I LIVED WITH YOU FOR FIVE YEARS-- AND NEVER EVEN SUSPECTED? I FEEL SO STUPID!
AND SO-- SO VIOLATED!
DON'T SAY THAT, LAURA!
12


HERE COMMANDER! SHE KNOWS TOO MUCH! KILL HER!
ME? BUT... BUT...
YES! I AM NOT A MAN! I AM COMMANDER BARAN OF THE DIRE WRAITHS--AND HUMAN LIFE MEANS NOTHING TO ME!
THEN SHOOT, MONSTER! DON'T BE CRUEL ENOUGH TO LET ME LIVE --NOW!
LAURA... PLEASE! DON'T MAKE THIS ANY HARDER FOR ME!
HE WON'T DO IT! HE CAN'T!
THERE! PROOF HE'S A TRAITOR! THERE'S ONLY ONE OPTION OPEN TO US!
YES! ONLY ONE!
YOU WROTE YOU OWN DEATH WARRENT COMMANDER--
--WHEN YOU SHOWED US WHAT YOU TRULY WERE!
SUDDENLY...
AND I KNOW WHAT YOU TRULY ARE, EVIL ONE!
WHO DARES--?!
ROM!
HOW DID HE FIND US HOW?
THERE IS AN INTERESTING TRACKING DEVICE ON EARTH--CALLED A TELEPHONE BOOK!
13


ONCE I LEARNED BARAN'S NAME, IT WAS A SIMPLE MATTER TO DETERMINE HIS SPECIFIC LOCATION!
LOOK OUT! HE'S USING THE NEUTRALIZER!
USE YOUR WEAPONS--QUICKLY! EVEN ROM CANNOT DEFEAT US ALL--IF WE ATTACK IN UNISON!
ARGHH
THEIR PISTOLS...ARE SETTING UP A VIBRATIONAL FIELD AROUND ME! I HAVE NEVER KNOWN... SUCH PAIN...
ALREADY MY CIRCUITS BEGIN TO RUPTURE AND FALTER! MY POWER IS HALVED--I CANNOT EVEN STAY ON MY FEET! I HAVE TO MUSTER THE ENERGY TO ONCE MORE RAISE MY NEUTRALIZER--
--AND BLAST THEM INTO LIMBO!
14


HAH! GOOD TRY, CYBORG--BUT YOU'VE LOST THE WAR! YOU NEED TIME TO REPAIR THE DAMAGE DONE TO YOU--BUT I WILL NOT GIVE YOU THAT TIME!
THE WRAITH SPEAKS TRUTH! EVEN HIS LONE WEAPON PREVENTS ME FROM MENDING MYSELF! I HAVE FAILED!
YOUR DOOM IS AT HAND, ROM! I TAKE YOUR NEUTRALIZER AS MY PRIZE!
IS THIS THE WAY IT ENDS? NO! IT MUST NOT BE SO!
WITHOUT MY PROTECTION, THE EARTH WILL SURELY FALL TO THE DIRE WRAITHS!
AND THEN THE STARS WILL FALL--AND PERHAPS EVEN BRIGHT GALADOR ITSELF WILL FALL!
I CANNOT ALLOW IT! THIS WRAITH WILL NOT WIN--THOUGH I MUST CRAWL TO HIM, FOOT BY FOOT...
... INCH BY INCH...
COWER, YOU GALADORIAN CUR!
YOUR POWER IS GONE, AND I WONDER--WHAT EFFECT WILL THE DREADED NEUTRALIZER HAVE... ON A SPACE KNIGHT?
15

SUDDENLY...
ZZRAK!
ARRR! I'M SHOT! BUT-- HOW?
THE NEUTRALIZER-- IT IS MINE AGAIN!
JOIN YOUR FELLOWS, WRAITH!
WHO SAVED ME?
I HAD NO CHOICE! DON'T YOU SEE? AFTER THEY WERE DONE WITH YOU, THEY WOULD HAVE-- KILLED HER!
MIKE! WHAT ARE YOU DOING?
HE'S MY ENEMY, LAURA! HE'LL BANISH ME!
AND MAYBE HE SHOULD! IT'S YOUR MOVE SPACEKNIGHT! I THROW DOWN MY GUN!
TOO MUCH DAMAGE HAS BEEN DONE THIS AFTERNOON! I WON'T BE A PARTY TO MORE!
MY MISSION CAN ONLY BE OVER WHEN THE LAST OF YOUR BREED IS HUNTED TO THE ENDS OF THE GALAXY AND CAST INTO LIMBO, WRAITH!
AND SO...
LAURA! DON'T CRY -- PLEASE!
IT SHOULDN'T BE LIKE THIS! IT IT SHOULDN'T!
16


IT HAS LONG BEEN MY DUTY TO DISTINGUISH WRAITH FROM HUMAN, MICHAEL BARAN--
--AND YOU, SURELY, ARE HUMAN!
WH-WHAT DO YOU MEAN?
HUMANITY IS A QUALITY OF SOUL-- NOT A BI-PRODUCT OF BIOLOGY!
YOU HAVE LEARNED HUMANITY, MICHAEL BARAN! THE WRAITH CALLED COMMANDER BARAN HAS BEEN BANISHED--
--AND RESTS IN A LIMBO OF HIS OWN MAKING!
DO YOU HEAR THAT, LAURA? WE HAVE A SECOND CHANCE!
DO WE, MIKE? DO WE?
LAURA! DON'T SAY THAT! I CHANGED FOR YOU! OUR LIFE TOGETHER IS ALL I WANT!
I LOVE YOU, LAURA! YOU CAN'T FORSAKE ME NOW!
I DON'T WANT TO, MIKE--BUT I'M SO CONFUSED! I NEED TO THINK THINGS OUT--ALONE!
ALL I KNOW IS THAT I LOVE YOU, TOO--AND THAT CONFUSES ME MORE!
LAURA--!
SO--THERE'S MORE TO THIS HUMANITY BUSINESS THAN I BELIEVED!
STILL FOR BETTER OR FOR WORSE, I WON'T BETRAY YOUR FAITH IN ME, GALADORIAN!
PERHAPS, BY BECOMING TRULY HUMAN, I CAN BALANCE THE SCALES FOR THE HUMANITY YOU LOST--
--WHEN YOU BECOME ROM, GREATEST OF THE SPACEKNIGHTS!
END.

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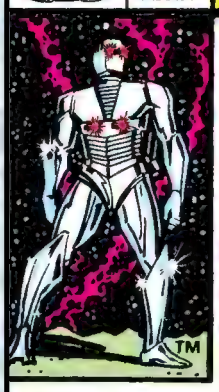
DETAILS INSIDE



ROM™

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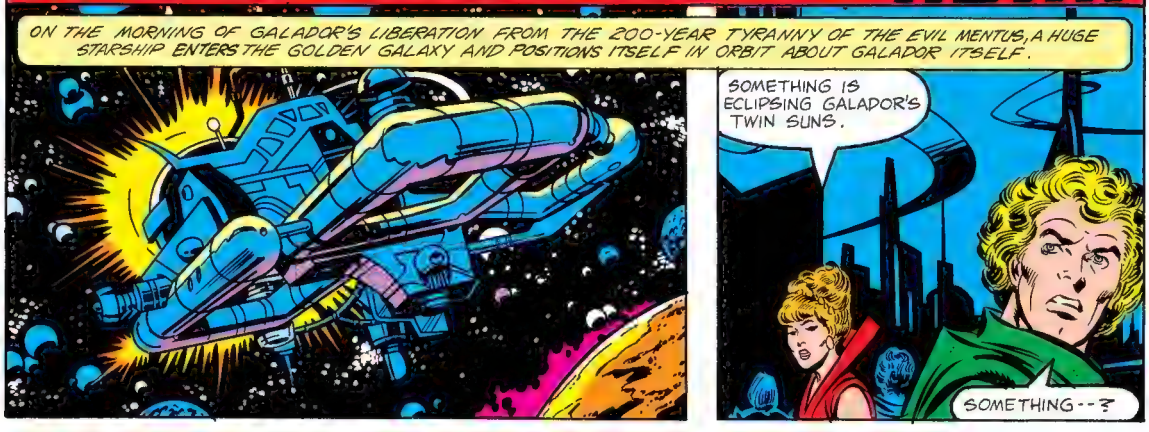
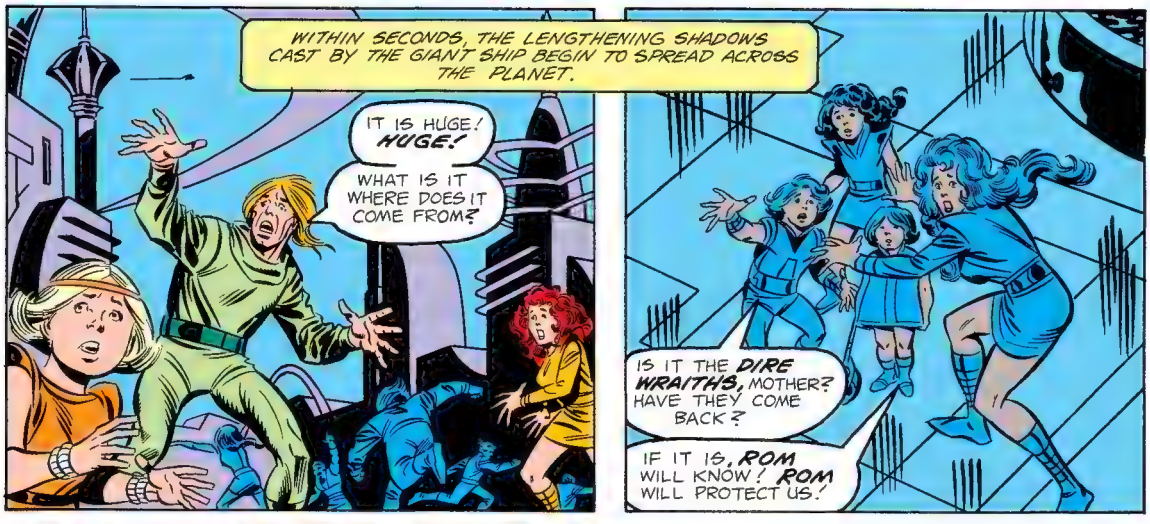
GALACTUS ON GALADOR!

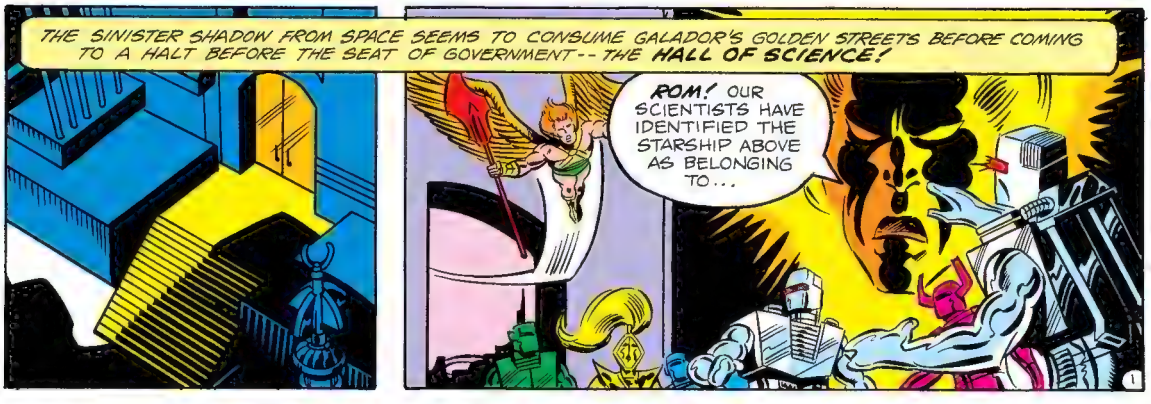
MILGROM

Two-hundred years ago, the evil Dire Wraiths threatened the peace-loving planet, Galador. In their homeworld's darkest hour, a thousand brave, young Galadorians sacrificed humanity itself to become Cyborg Warriors, a last desperate line of defense. Though hopelessly outnumbered, these Spaceknights triumphed, and pursued the remnants of the Wraith horde across the universe. Now, alone in the Enemy's mightiest stronghold, on a backward planet called Earth, one Galadorian Warrior faces his most awesome challenge.

STAN LEE PRESENTS: THE GREATEST OF THE SPACEKNIGHTS--ROM!


ON THE MORNING OF GALADOR'S LIBERATION FROM THE 200-YEAR TYRANNY OF THE EVIL MENTUS, A HUGE STARSHIP ENTERS THE GOLDEN GALAXY AND POSITIONS ITSELF IN ORBIT ABOUT GALADOR ITSELF.
SOMETHING IS ECLIPSING GALADOR'S TWIN SUNS.
SOMETHING--?


WITHIN SECONDS, THE LENGTHENING SHADOWS CAST BY THE GIANT SHIP BEGIN TO SPREAD ACROSS THE PLANET.
IT IS HUGE! HUGE!
WHAT IS IT WHERE DOES IT COME FROM?
IS IT THE DIRE WRAITHS, MOTHER? HAVE THEY COME BACK?
IF IT IS, ROM WILL KNOW! ROM WILL PROTECT US!


THE SINISTER SHADOW FROM SPACE SEEMS TO CONSUME GALADOR'S GOLDEN STREETS BEFORE COMING TO A HALT BEFORE THE SEAT OF GOVERNMENT--THE HALL OF SCIENCE!
ROM! OUR SCIENTISTS HAVE IDENTIFIED THE STARSHIP ABOVE AS BELONGING TO...

GALACTUS!

RELISH YOUR REMAINING MOMENTS OF EXISTENCE, WORLDLINGS FOR I-- TERRAX THE TAMER-- LAY CLAIM TO YOUR PLANET TO APPEASE THE ALL-CONSUMING HUNGER OF GALACTUS!

ACROSS TRACKLESS SPACE DID THE PRIME DIRECTOR'S TRANSCENDENT MIND DETECT AND TREMBLE--AT THE COMING OF THE EATER-OF-WORLDS!

HE IS SO... HUGE! SO SUPREMELY SELF-CONFIDENT! OUR PEOPLE RUN TO US FOR SALVATION, BUT WHAT CAN WE DO AGAINST THE LIKES OF... GALACTUS?

WE CAN FIGHT FOR OUR WORLD, TERMINATOR! WE CAN DIE AS WE HAVE LIVED... DEFIANT!

THERE! THE ALIEN APPROACHES THE HALL OF SCIENCE!

EVEN NOW ROM AND THE SPACEKNIGHTS CONFRONT HIM!

THEY WILL SAVE US! THEY MUST!

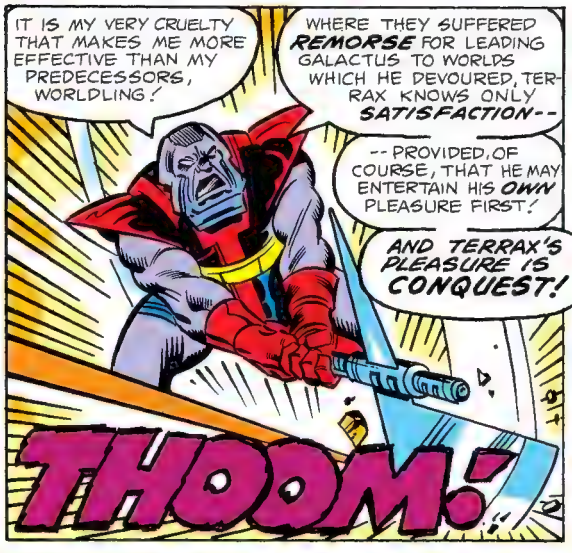
THUS SPEAKS ROM!

WARNING: STAN (THE MAN) LEE HIMSELF HAS DETERMINED THAT THE EXCITEMENT IN THESE 21 PAGES CAN BE HARMFUL TO YOUR HEALTH!

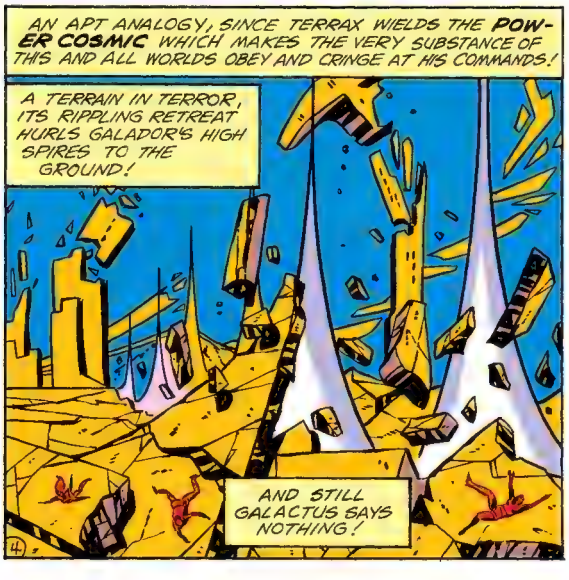
BOISTEROUS BILL MANTLO PEERLESS PROSER * OUR PAL SAL BUSCEMA POWERFUL PENCILER * JOLTIN' JOE SINNOTT INCREDIBLE EMBELLISHER

LILTIN' LETTERS J. CHIANG & J. SIMEK * INCOMPARABLE COLORS BEN SEAN * AMIABLE AL MILGROM AMAZING EDITOR * JAUNTY JIM SHOOTER OUTSTANDING OVERSEER

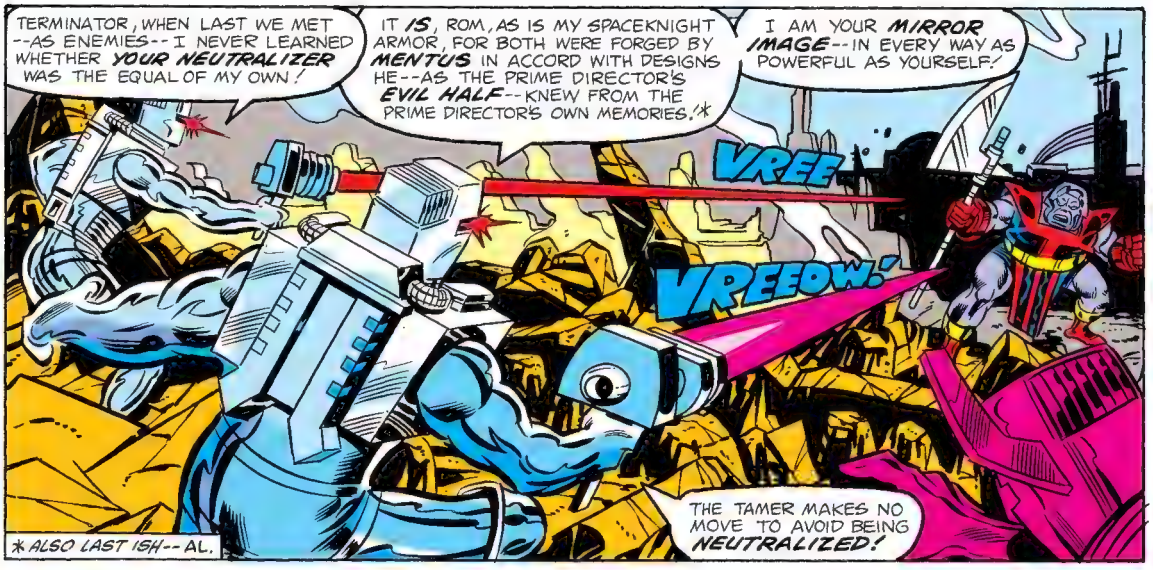
WHY DO YOU STAND IN ABJECT AWE? DISPERSE! GO! EAT! DRINK! BE MERRY!
YOU WILL NEVER SAMPLE SUCH SIMPLE PLEASURES AGAIN!
WHO IS YON CREATURE WHO PRECEDES GALACTUS?
HE DID CALL HIMSELF... TERRAX THE TAMER!
TERRAX THE TYRANT, MORE LIKE...THE MOST CRUEL OF GALACTUS' HERALDS.


IT IS MY VERY CRUELTY THAT MAKES ME MORE EFFECTIVE THAN MY PREDECESSORS, WORLDLING!
WHERE THEY SUFFERED REMORSE FOR LEADING GALACTUS TO WORLDS WHICH HE DEVOURED, TERRAX KNOWS ONLY SATISFACTION--
--PROVIDED, OF COURSE, THAT HE MAY ENTERTAIN HIS OWN PLEASURE FIRST!
AND TERRAX'S PLEASURE IS CONQUEST!
THOOM!

HIS BATTLE-AXE CLEAVES THE PLANET TO ITS VERY CORE!
GALADOR SHUDDERS--
--AS IF IT WERE A LIVING THING IN PAIN FROM TERRAX'S ATTACK!

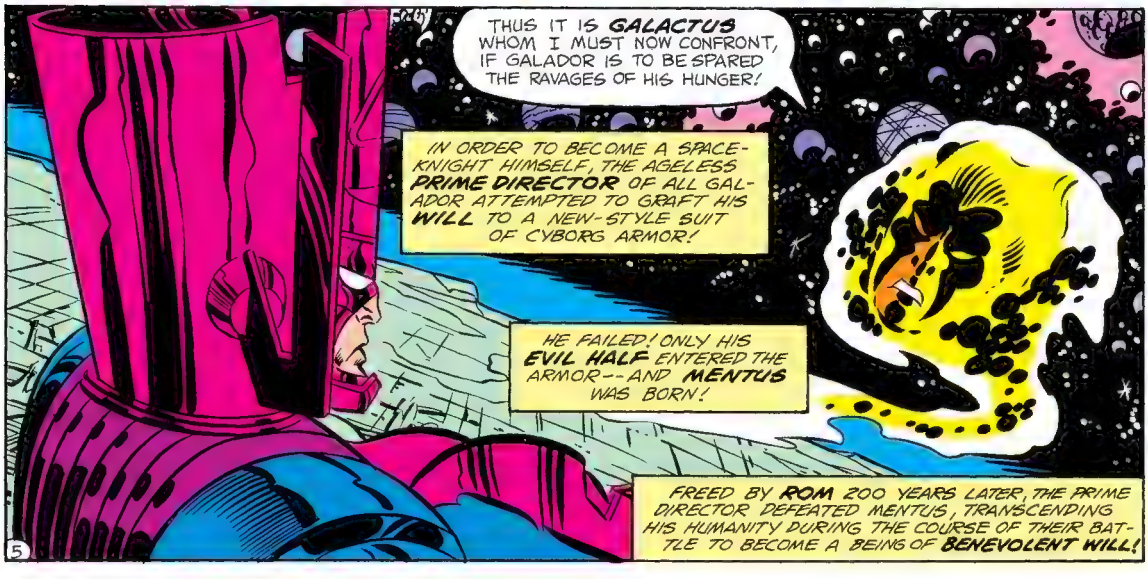

AN APT ANALOGY, SINCE TERRAX WIELDS THE POWER COSMIC WHICH MAKES THE VERY SUBSTANCE OF THIS AND ALL WORLDS OBEY AND CRINGE AT HIS COMMANDS!
A TERRAIN IN TERROR, ITS RIPPLING RETREAT HURLS GALADOR'S HIGH SPIRES TO THE GROUND!
AND STILL GALACTUS SAYS NOTHING!
4

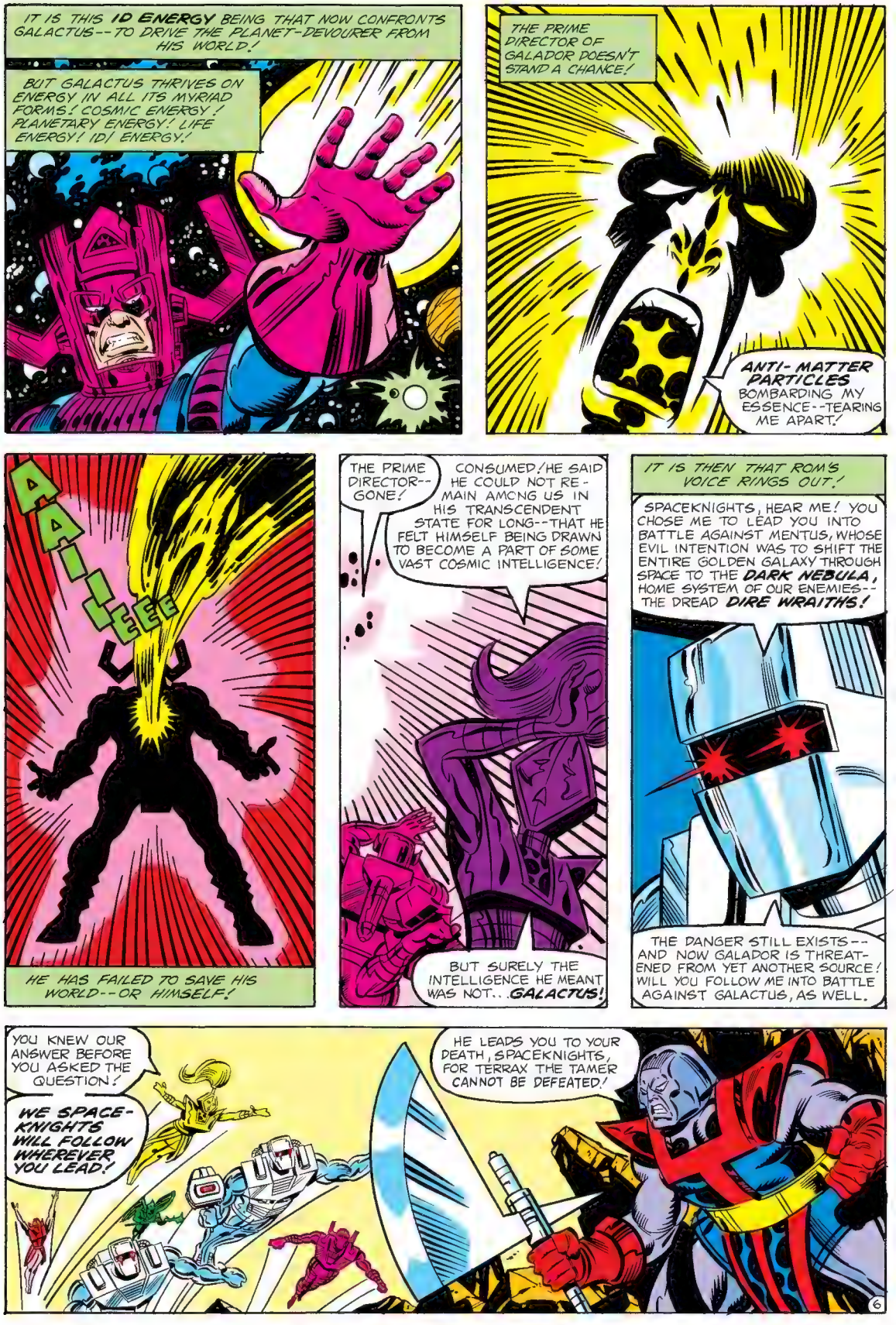
ROM! SUCH DEVASTATION--!
MUST BE STOPPED! STAND WITH ME, TERMINATOR, YOU WHO SHARE MY FORM* AS WE SUMMON FROM SUBSPACE...OUR IDENTICAL NEUTRALIZERS!
* IN CASE YOU MISSED LAST ISH (SHAME ON YOU!) KNOW NOW THAT THERE ARE TWO ROMS--THE REAL ONE, AND THE SPACEKNIGHT CALLED TERMINATOR POSSESSING HALF ROM'S HUMANITY HOUSED IN A SECOND SUIT OF THE SILVER CYBORG'S ARMOR! WHEW!--AL.


TERMINATOR, WHEN LAST WE MET --AS ENEMIES-- I NEVER LEARNED WHETHER YOUR NEUTRALIZER WAS THE EQUAL OF MY OWN!
IT IS, ROM, AS IS MY SPACEKNIGHT ARMOR, FOR BOTH WERE FORGED BY MENTUS IN ACCORD WITH DESIGNS HE--AS THE PRIME DIRECTOR'S EVIL HALF--KNEW FROM THE PRIME DIRECTOR'S OWN MEMORIES.*
I AM YOUR MIRROR IMAGE--IN EVERY WAY AS POWERFUL AS YOURSELF!
VREE
VREEOW!
THE TAMER MAKES NO MOVE TO AVOID BEING NEUTRALIZED!
*ALSO LAST ISH--AL.

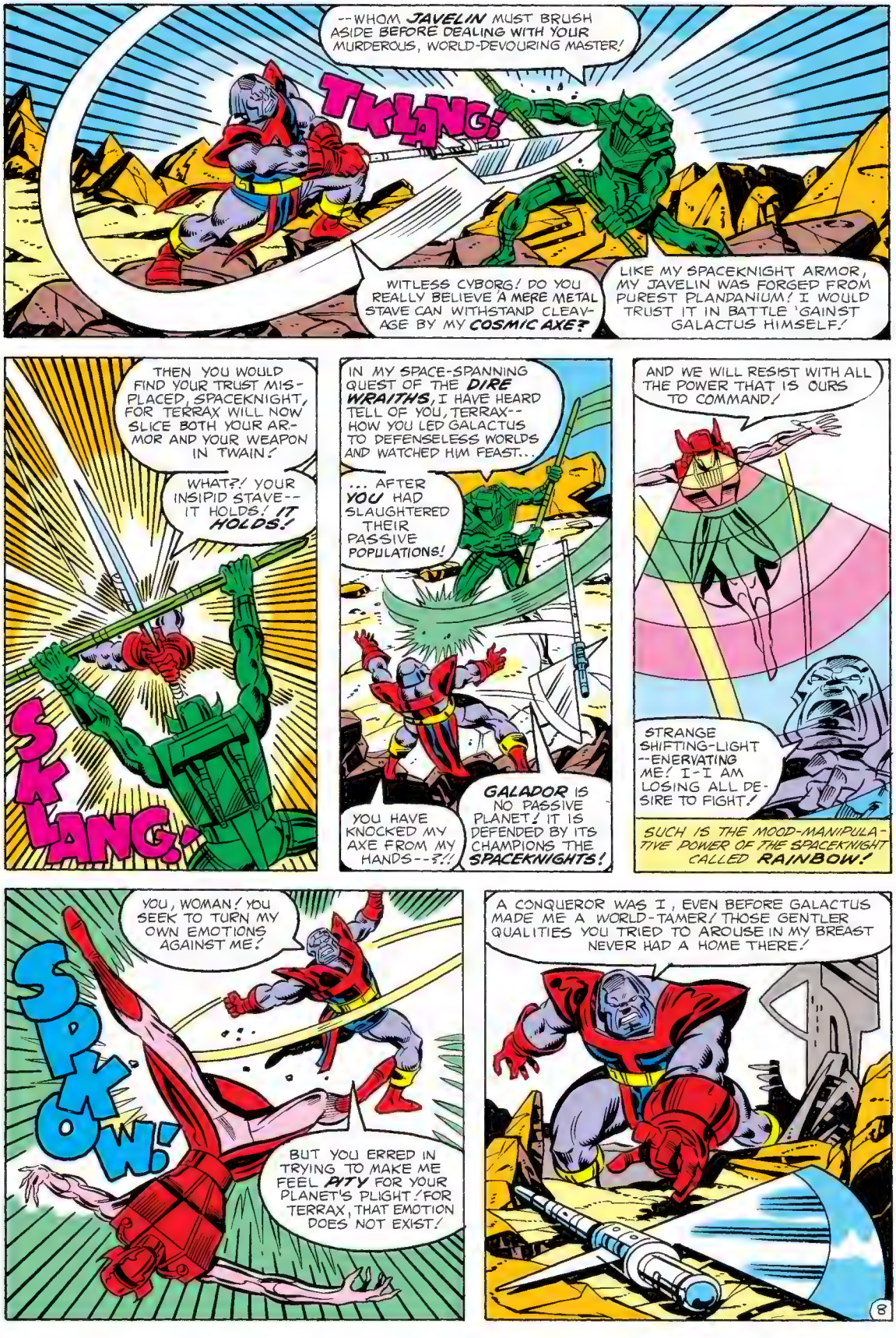
INDEED.
DID I NOT SAY THAT, BY THE GRACE OF MY MASTER, GALACTUS--
--I WIELD THE POWER COSMIC?!!

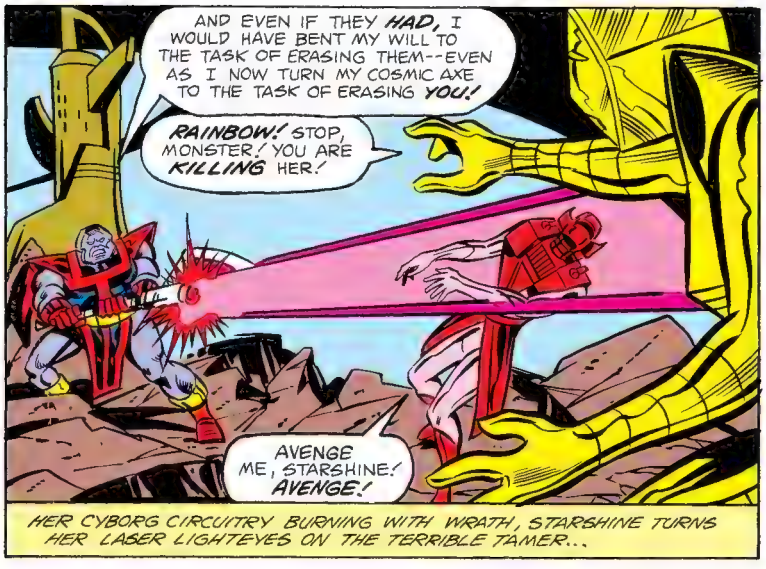
OUR NEUTRALIZER BEAMS --NEUTRALIZED THEMSELVES?! NEVER HAS SUCH A THING TRANSPIRED!
NEVER BEFORE HAS ANY GALADORIAN ENCOUNTERED GALACTUS! COMPARED TO HIM, TERRAX'S POWER IS NOTHING!

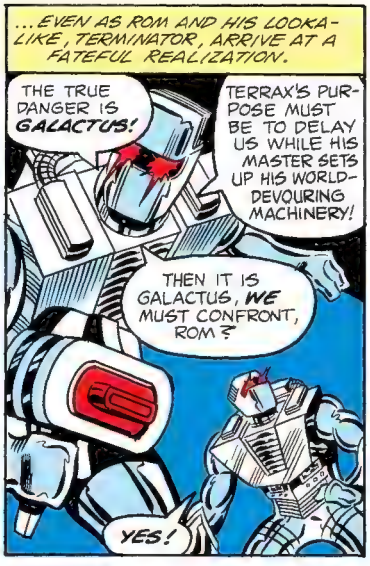

THUS IT IS GALACTUS WHOM I MUST NOW CONFRONT, IF GALADOR IS TO BE SPARED THE RAVAGES OF HIS HUNGER!
IN ORDER TO BECOME A SPACEKNIGHT HIMSELF, THE AGELESS PRIME DIRECTOR OF ALL GALADOR ATTEMPTED TO GRAFT HIS WILL TO A NEW-STYLE SUIT OF CYBORG ARMOR!
HE FAILED! ONLY HIS EVIL HALF ENTERED THE ARMOR--AND MENTUS WAS BORN!
FREED BY ROM 200 YEARS LATER, THE PRIME DIRECTOR DEFEATED MENTUS, TRANSCENDING HIS HUMANITY DURING THE COURSE OF THEIR BATTLE TO BECOME A BEING OF BENEVOLENT WILL!
5

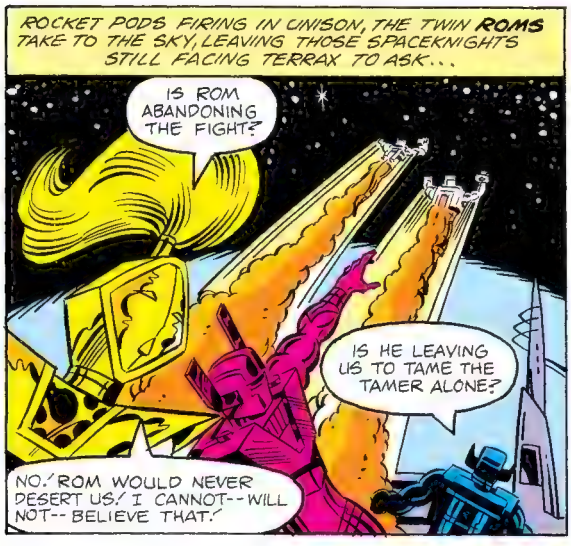

IT IS THIS ID ENERGY BEING THAT NOW CONFRONTS GALACTUS--TO DRIVE THE PLANET-DEVOURER FROM HIS WORLD!
BUT GALACTUS THRIVES ON ENERGY IN ALL ITS MYRIAD FORMS! COSMIC ENERGY! PLANETARY ENERGY! LIFE ENERGY! ID! ENERGY!
THE PRIME DIRECTOR OF GALADOR DOESN'T STAND A CHANCE!
ANTI-MATTER PARTICLES BOMBARDING MY ESSENCE--TEARING ME APART!
AA-I-EEE
HE HAS FAILED TO SAVE HIS WORLD--OR HIMSELF!
THE PRIME DIRECTOR--GONE!
CONSUMED! HE SAID HE COULD NOT REMAIN AMONG US IN HIS TRANSCENDENT STATE FOR LONG--THAT HE FELT HIMSELF BEING DRAWN TO BECOME A PART OF SOME VAST COSMIC INTELLIGENCE!
BUT SURELY THE INTELLIGENCE HE MEANT WAS NOT...GALACTUS!
IT IS THEN THAT ROM'S VOICE RINGS OUT!
SPACEKNIGHTS, HEAR ME! YOU CHOSE ME TO LEAD YOU INTO BATTLE AGAINST MENTUS, WHOSE EVIL INTENTION WAS TO SHIFT THE ENTIRE GOLDEN GALAXY THROUGH SPACE TO THE DARK NEBULA, HOME SYSTEM OF OUR ENEMIES--THE DREAD DIRE WRAITHS!
THE DANGER STILL EXISTS--AND NOW GALADOR IS THREATENED FROM YET ANOTHER SOURCE! WILL YOU FOLLOW ME INTO BATTLE AGAINST GALACTUS, AS WELL.
YOU KNEW OUR ANSWER BEFORE YOU ASKED THE QUESTION!
WE SPACEKNIGHTS WILL FOLLOW WHEREVER YOU LEAD!
HE LEADS YOU TO YOUR DEATH, SPACEKNIGHTS, FOR TERRAX THE TAMER CANNOT BE DEFEATED!
6

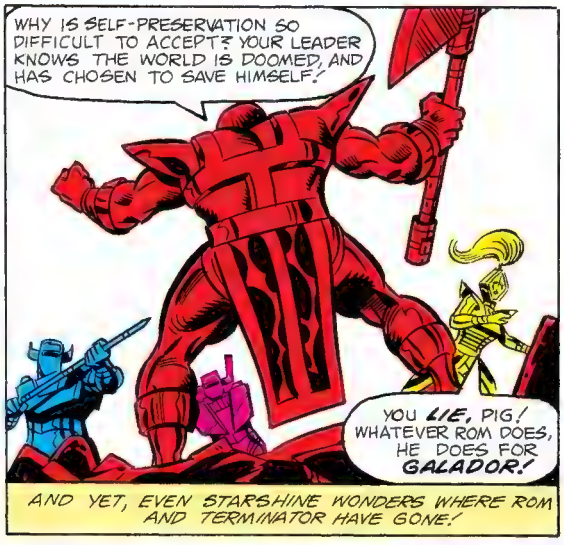
YET, PERHAPS THE DOOM I DEAL YOU WILL COME AS A MERCY!
PERISHING NOW, YOU WILL BE SPARED THE SIGHT OF YOUR WORLD IN ITS DEATH-THROES--
--DYING THAT GALACTUS MAY LIVE!
AT THE TOUCH OF TERRAX'S COSMIC AXE, THE EARTH--THE TERRA OF GALADOR AGAIN REBELS AGAINST ITS INHABITANTS!
H-HOW CAN WE COMBAT ONE--
--WHO CAN TURN OUR OWN PLANET AGAINST US?!
HAVE YOU ANY ANSWER TO GIVE THAT DYING ANGEL, ROM?
I KNOW NO BETTER HOW TO DEFEAT TERRAX THAN YOU, FAIR STARSHINE! I ONLY KNOW THAT WHILE HE MAY BE MASTER OF THE ROCK, MOLDER OF THE MARBLE.
--THAT WE BE SPACEKNIGHTS, PROUDEST OF THE PROUD!
WE WILL RESIST WITH WHATE'ER WEAPONS WE, POSSESS, WITH THE INDOMITABLE FORCE OF OUR WILLS, AND--SHOULD THAT PROVE INSUFFICIENT--THEN DEFIANCE SHALL WE HURL AT THE TAMER WITH OUR LAST DYING BREATHS!
YOUR WORDS FILL ME WITH COURAGE, ROM! HEARING YOU SPEAK, I WOULD BELIEVE THAT ALL IS POSSIBLE!
THAT IS WHY YOU ARE PROCLAIMED THE GREATEST OF SPACEKNIGHTS! WHERE OTHERS WOULD SUBMIT TO A SEEMINGLY IMPLACABLE FATE, YOU FIGHT ON!
LEAD US, ROM! LET THE LIGHTEYES OF STARSHINE ILLUMINE THE WAY DOWN WHICH YOU TAKE US!
AND LET THE BLUDGEONING FISTS OF HAMMERHAND TEACH THE TAMER THAT, THOUGH THERE BE NO SPACEKNIGHT AS MIGHTY AS ROM--
SKRASH!
--THERE BE OTHERS STILL WITH POWER A'PLENTY TO WREAK DEVASTATION UPON A FOE!
PRETTY SPEECHES DO NOT IMPRESS ME, SPACEKNIGHTS! I AM TERRAX THE TAMER! TERRAX THE TERRIBLE!
WITH MY COSMIC AXE IN HAND, I HAVE BEEN KNOWN TO CLEAVE THE COSMIC STRATUM ITSELF!
ONLY GALACTUS IS MORE POWERFUL THAN I! ONLY GALACTUS MAY MASTER ME!
BASE BRAGGART! YOU ARE BUT A SINISTER SERVANT--
7

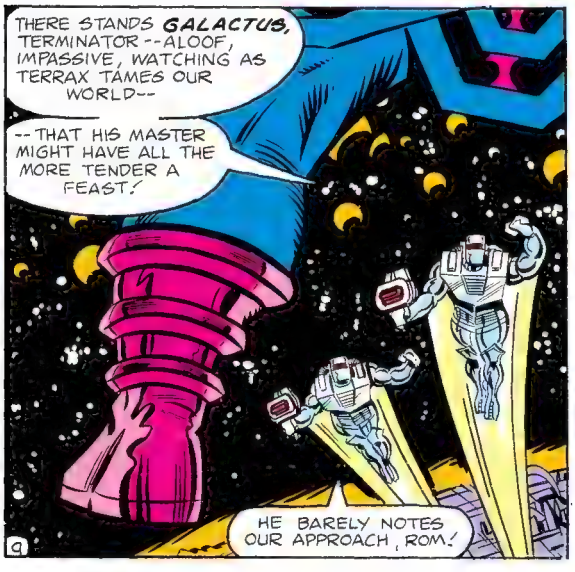

--WHOM JAVELIN MUST BRUSH ASIDE BEFORE DEALING WITH YOUR MURDEROUS, WORLD-DEVOURING MASTER!
TKLANG!
WITLESS CYBORG! DO YOU REALLY BELIEVE A MERE METAL STAVE CAN WITHSTAND CLEAVAGE BY MY COSMIC AXE?
LIKE MY SPACEKNIGHT ARMOR, MY JAVELIN WAS FORGED FROM PUREST PLANDANIUM! I WOULD TRUST IT IN BATTLE 'GAINST GALACTUS HIMSELF!
THEN YOU WOULD FIND YOUR TRUST MISPLACED, SPACEKNIGHT, FOR TERRAX WILL NOW SLICE BOTH YOUR ARMOR AND YOUR WEAPON IN TWAIN!
WHAT?! YOUR INSIPID STAVE--IT HOLDS! IT HOLDS!
SKLANG!
IN MY SPACE-SPANNING QUEST OF THE DIRE WRAITHS, I HAVE HEARD TELL OF YOU, TERRAX--HOW YOU LED GALACTUS TO DEFENSELESS WORLDS AND WATCHED HIM FEAST...
... AFTER YOU HAD SLAUGHTERED THEIR PASSIVE POPULATIONS!
YOU HAVE KNOCKED MY AXE FROM MY HANDS--?!!
GALADOR IS NO PASSIVE PLANET! IT IS DEFENDED BY ITS CHAMPIONS THE SPACEKNIGHTS!
AND WE WILL RESIST WITH ALL THE POWER THAT IS OURS TO COMMAND!
STRANGE SHIFTING-LIGHT--ENERVATING ME! I-I AM LOSING ALL DESIRE TO FIGHT!
SUCH IS THE MOOD-MANIPULATIVE POWER OF THE SPACEKNIGHT CALLED RAINBOW!
YOU, WOMAN! YOU SEEK TO TURN MY OWN EMOTIONS AGAINST ME!
SPKOW!
BUT YOU ERRED IN TRYING TO MAKE ME FEEL PITY FOR YOUR PLANET'S PLIGHT! FOR TERRAX, THAT EMOTION DOES NOT EXIST!
A CONQUEROR WAS I, EVEN BEFORE GALACTUS MADE ME A WORLD-TAMER! THOSE GENTLER QUALITIES YOU TRIED TO AROUSE IN MY BREAST NEVER HAD A HOME THERE!
8

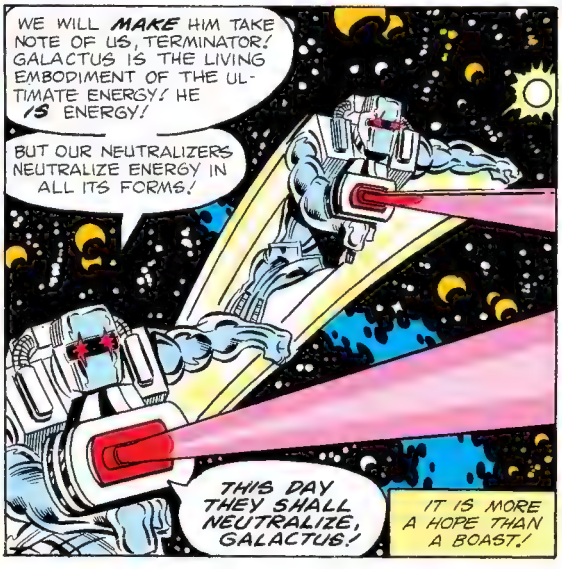

AND EVEN IF THEY HAD, I WOULD HAVE BENT MY WILL TO THE TASK OF ERASING THEM--EVEN AS I NOW TURN MY COSMIC AXE TO THE TASK OF ERASING YOU!
RAINBOW! STOP, MONSTER! YOU ARE KILLING HER!
AVENGE ME, STARSHINE! AVENGE!
HER CYBORG CIRCUITRY BURNING WITH WRATH, STARSHINE TURNS HER LASER LIGHTEYES ON THE TERRIBLE TAMER...

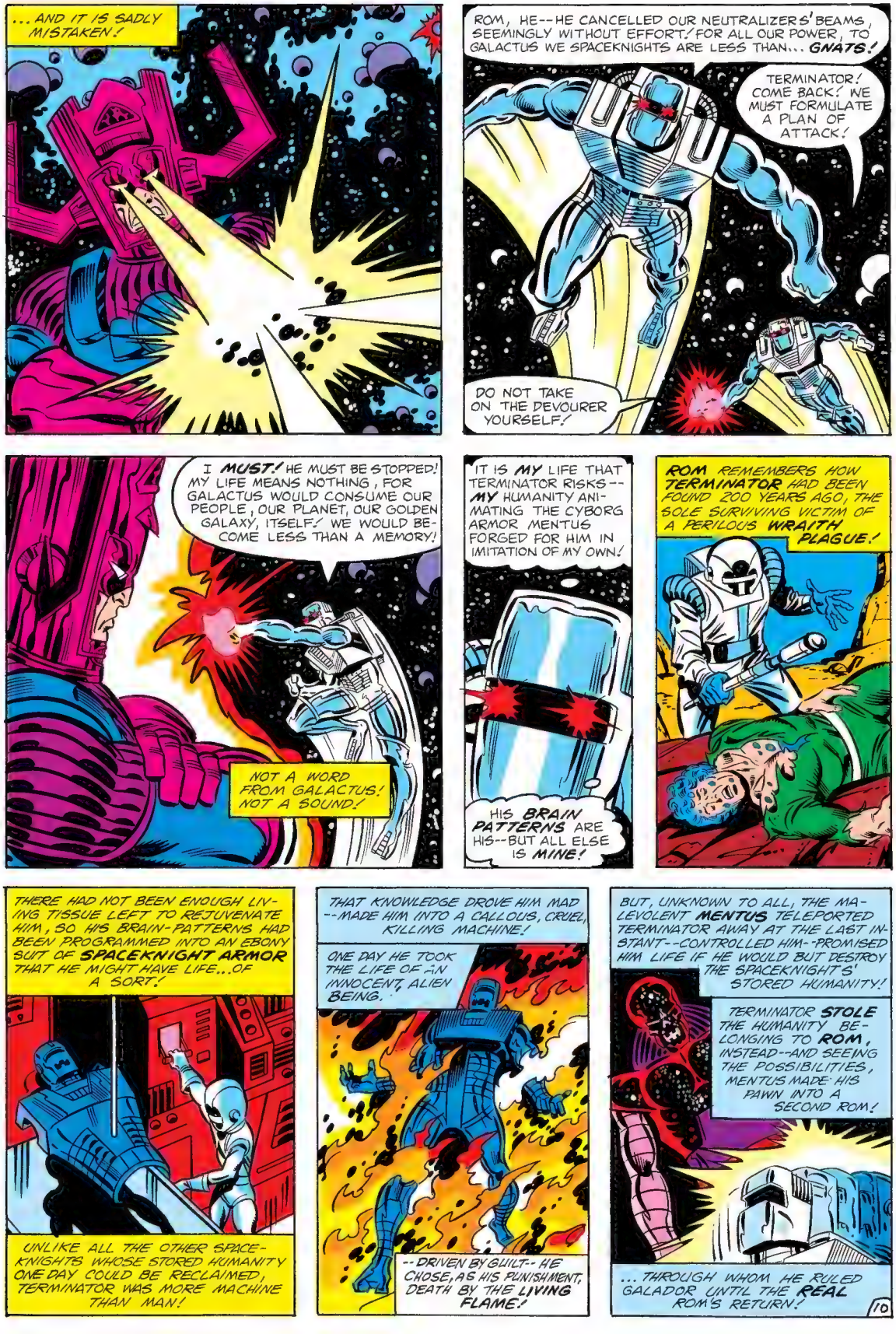

...EVEN AS ROM AND HIS LOOKA-LIKE, TERMINATOR, ARRIVE AT A FATEFUL REALIZATION.
THE TRUE DANGER IS GALACTUS!
TERRAX'S PURPOSE MUST BE TO DELAY US WHILE HIS MASTER SETS UP HIS WORLD-DEVOURING MACHINERY!
THEN IT IS GALACTUS, WE MUST CONFRONT, ROM?
YES!

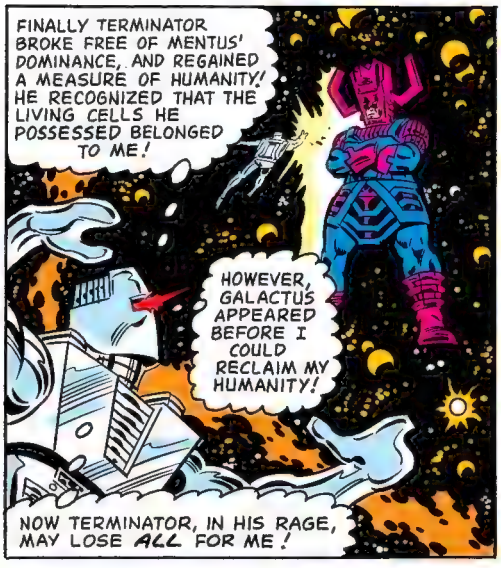

ROCKET PODS FIRING IN UNISON, THE TWIN ROMS TAKE TO THE SKY, LEAVING THOSE SPACEKNIGHTS STILL FACING TERRAX TO ASK...
IS ROM ABANDONING THE FIGHT?
IS HE LEAVING US TO TAME THE TAMER ALONE?
NO! ROM WOULD NEVER DESERT US! I CANNOT--WILL NOT--BELIEVE THAT!

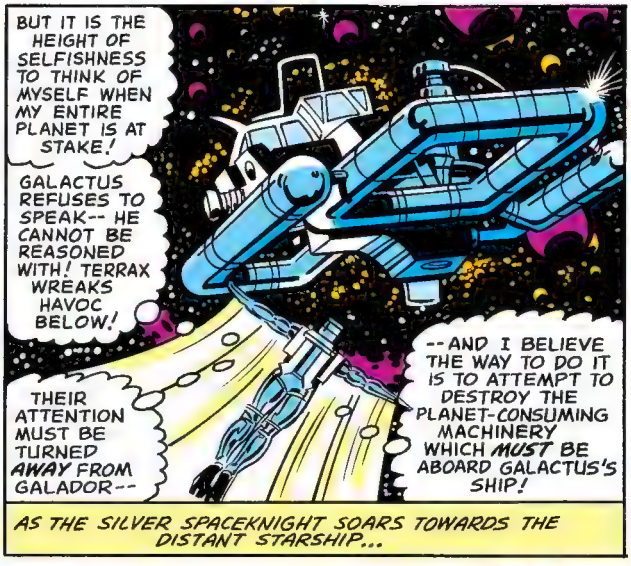

WHY IS SELF-PRESERVATION SO DIFFICULT TO ACCEPT? YOUR LEADER KNOWS THE WORLD IS DOOMED, AND HAS CHOSEN TO SAVE HIMSELF!
YOU LIE, PIG! WHATEVER ROM DOES, HE DOES FOR GALADOR!
AND YET, EVEN STARSHINE WONDERS WHERE ROM AND TERMINATOR HAVE GONE!


THERE STANDS GALACTUS, TERMINATOR--ALOOF, IMPASSIVE, WATCHING AS TERRAX TAMES OUR WORLD--
--THAT HIS MASTER MIGHT HAVE ALL THE MORE TENDER A FEAST!
HE BARELY NOTES OUR APPROACH, ROM!

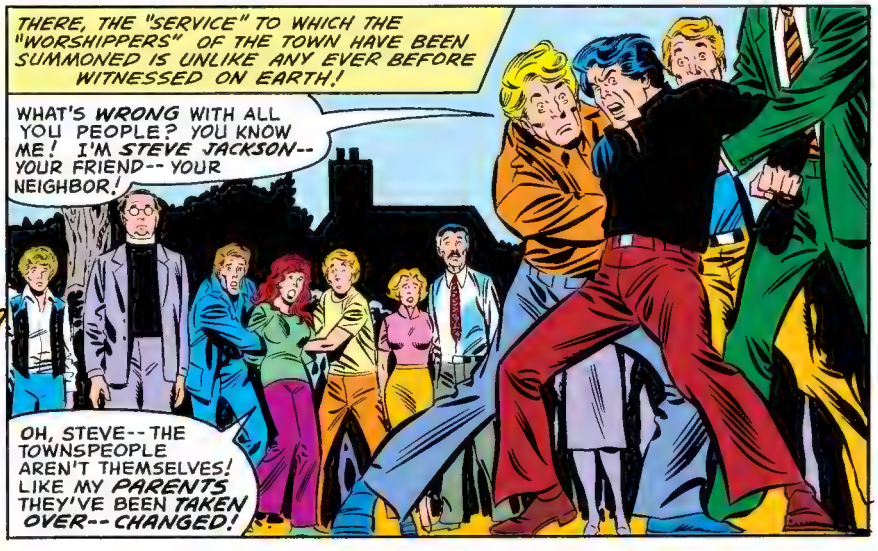

WE WILL MAKE HIM TAKE NOTE OF US, TERMINATOR! GALACTUS IS THE LIVING EMBODIMENT OF THE ULTIMATE ENERGY! HE IS ENERGY!
BUT OUR NEUTRALIZERS NEUTRALIZE ENERGY IN ALL ITS FORMS!
THIS DAY THEY SHALL NEUTRALIZE, GALACTUS!
IT IS MORE A HOPE THAN A BOAST!

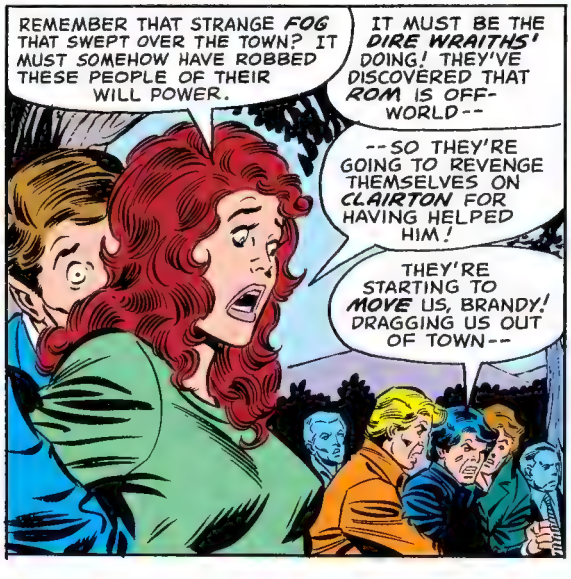

...AND IT IS SADLY MISTAKEN!
ROM, HE--HE CANCELLED OUR NEUTRALIZER'S' BEAMS, SEEMINGLY WITHOUT EFFORT! FOR ALL OUR POWER, TO GALACTUS WE SPACEKNIGHTS ARE LESS THAN... GNATS!
TERMINATOR! COME BACK! WE MUST FORMULATE A PLAN OF ATTACK!
DO NOT TAKE ON THE DEVOURER YOURSELF!
I MUST! HE MUST BE STOPPED! MY LIFE MEANS NOTHING, FOR GALACTUS WOULD CONSUME OUR PEOPLE, OUR PLANET, OUR GOLDEN GALAXY, ITSELF! WE WOULD BECOME LESS THAN A MEMORY!
NOT A WORD FROM GALACTUS! NOT A SOUND!
IT IS MY LIFE THAT TERMINATOR RISKS--MY HUMANITY ANIMATING THE CYBORG ARMOR MENTUS FORGED FOR HIM IN IMITATION OF MY OWN!
HIS BRAIN PATTERNS ARE HIS--BUT ALL ELSE IS MINE!
ROM REMEMBERS HOW TERMINATOR HAD BEEN FOUND 200 YEARS AGO, THE SOLE SURVIVING VICTIM OF A PERILOUS WRAITH PLAGUE!
THERE HAD NOT BEEN ENOUGH LIVING TISSUE LEFT TO REJUVENATE HIM, SO HIS BRAIN-PATTERNS HAD BEEN PROGRAMMED INTO AN EBONY SUIT OF SPACEKNIGHT ARMOR THAT HE MIGHT HAVE LIFE...OF A SORT!
UNLIKE ALL THE OTHER SPACEKNIGHTS WHOSE STORED HUMANITY ONE DAY COULD BE RECLAIMED, TERMINATOR WAS MORE MACHINE THAN MAN!
THAT KNOWLEDGE DROVE HIM MAD --MADE HIM INTO A CALLOUS, CRUEL, KILLING MACHINE!
ONE DAY HE TOOK THE LIFE OF AN INNOCENT ALIEN BEING.
--DRIVEN BY GUILT-- HE CHOSE, AS HIS PUNISHMENT, DEATH BY THE LIVING FLAME!
BUT, UNKNOWN TO ALL, THE MALEVOLENT MENTUS TELEPORTED TERMINATOR AWAY AT THE LAST INSTANT--CONTROLLED HIM--PROMISED HIM LIFE IF HE WOULD BUT DESTROY THE SPACEKNIGHTS' STORED HUMANITY!
TERMINATOR STOLE THE HUMANITY BELONGING TO ROM, INSTEAD--AND SEEING THE POSSIBILITIES, MENTUS MADE HIS PAWN INTO A SECOND ROM!
...THROUGH WHOM HE RULED GALADOR UNTIL THE REAL ROM'S RETURN!
10


FINALLY TERMINATOR BROKE FREE OF MENTUS' DOMINANCE, AND REGAINED A MEASURE OF HUMANITY! HE RECOGNIZED THAT THE LIVING CELLS HE POSSESSED BELONGED TO ME!
HOWEVER, GALACTUS APPEARED BEFORE I COULD RECLAIM MY HUMANITY!
NOW TERMINATOR, IN HIS RAGE, MAY LOSE ALL FOR ME!


BUT IT IS THE HEIGHT OF SELFISHNESS TO THINK OF MYSELF WHEN MY ENTIRE PLANET IS AT STAKE!
GALACTUS REFUSES TO SPEAK-- HE CANNOT BE REASONED WITH! TERRAX WREAKS HAVOC BELOW!
THEIR ATTENTION MUST BE TURNED AWAY FROM GALADOR--
--AND I BELIEVE THE WAY TO DO IT IS TO ATTEMPT TO DESTROY THE PLANET-CONSUMING MACHINERY WHICH MUST BE ABOARD GALACTUS'S SHIP!
AS THE SILVER SPACEKNIGHT SOARS TOWARDS THE DISTANT STARSHIP...

...CHURCH BELLS SUMMON A CONGREGATION MORE THAN A GALAXY AWAY, IN CLAIRTON, WEST VIRGINIA!
BONG! BONG! BONG!

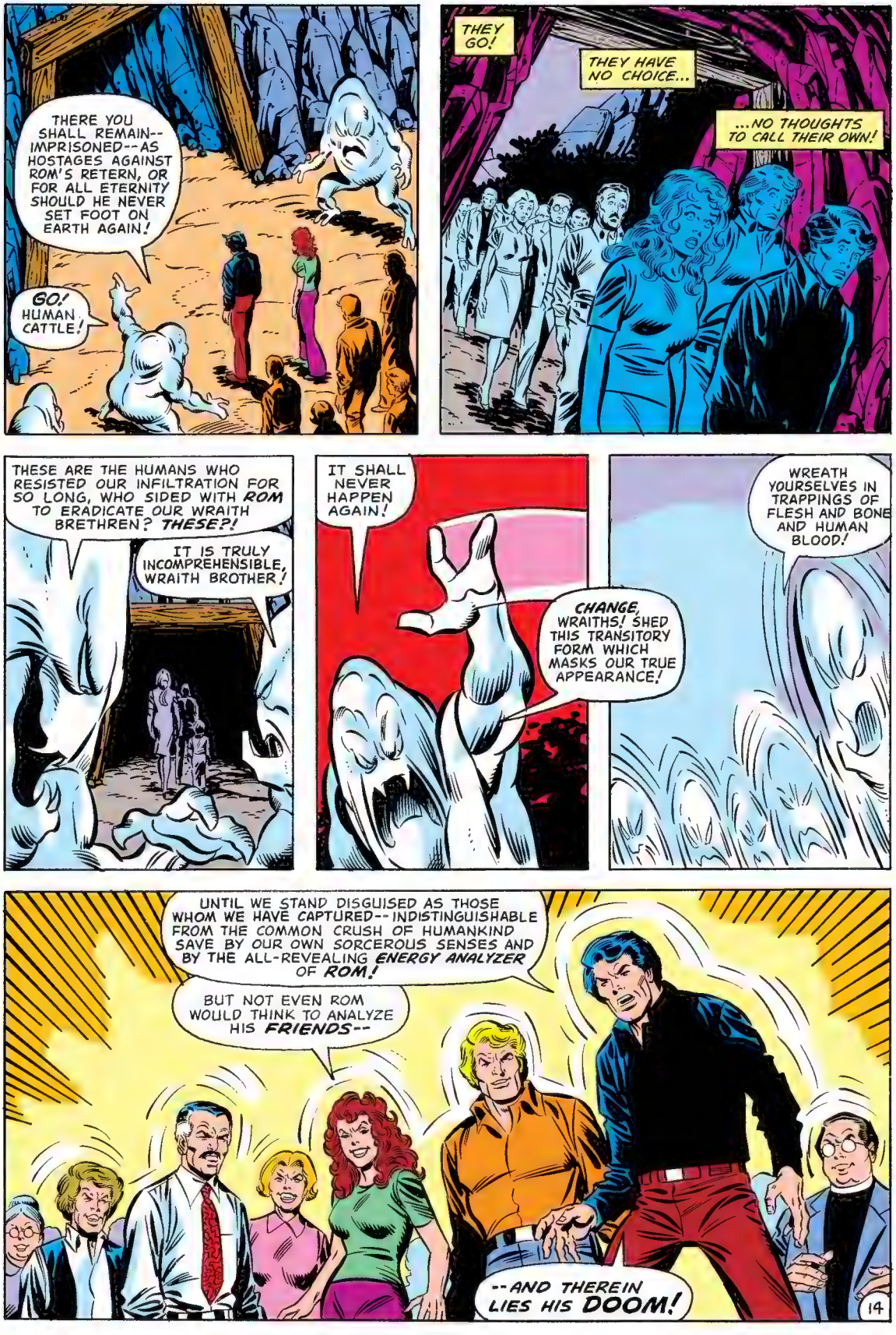

THERE, THE "SERVICE" TO WHICH THE "WORSHIPPERS" OF THE TOWN HAVE BEEN SUMMONED IS UNLIKE ANY EVER BEFORE WITNESSED ON EARTH!
WHAT'S WRONG WITH ALL YOU PEOPLE? YOU KNOW ME! I'M STEVE JACKSON-- YOUR FRIEND-- YOUR NEIGHBOR!
OH, STEVE-- THE TOWNSPEOPLE AREN'T THEMSELVES! LIKE MY PARENTS THEY'VE BEEN TAKEN OVER-- CHANGED!

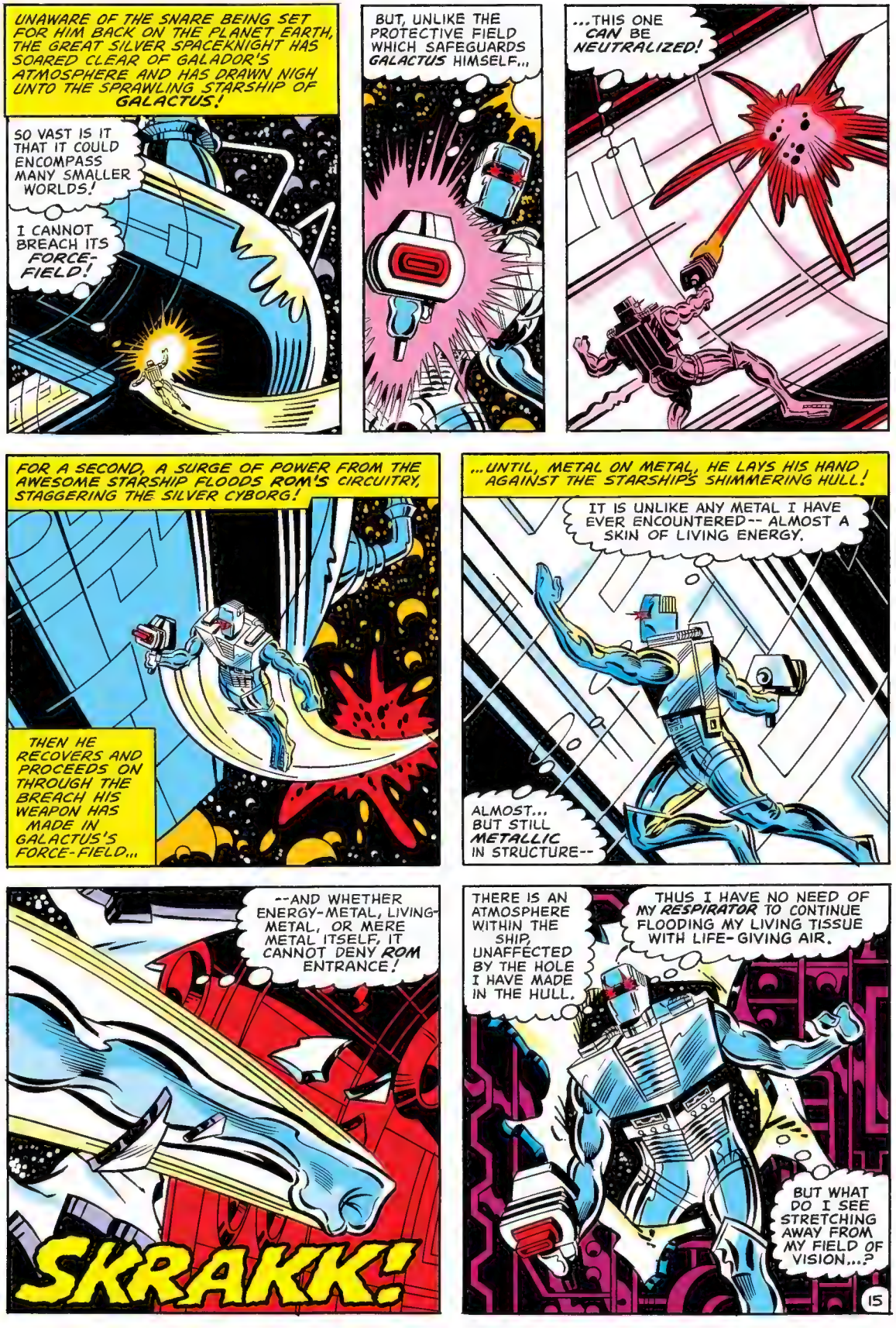

REMEMBER THAT STRANGE FOG THAT SWEPT OVER THE TOWN? IT MUST SOMEHOW HAVE ROBBED THESE PEOPLE OF THEIR WILL POWER.
IT MUST BE THE DIRE WRAITHS' DOING! THEY'VE DISCOVERED THAT ROM IS OFF-WORLD--
--SO THEY'RE GOING TO REVENGE THEMSELVES ON CLAIRTON FOR HAVING HELPED HIM!
THEY'RE STARTING TO MOVE US, BRANDY! DRAGGING US OUT OF TOWN--

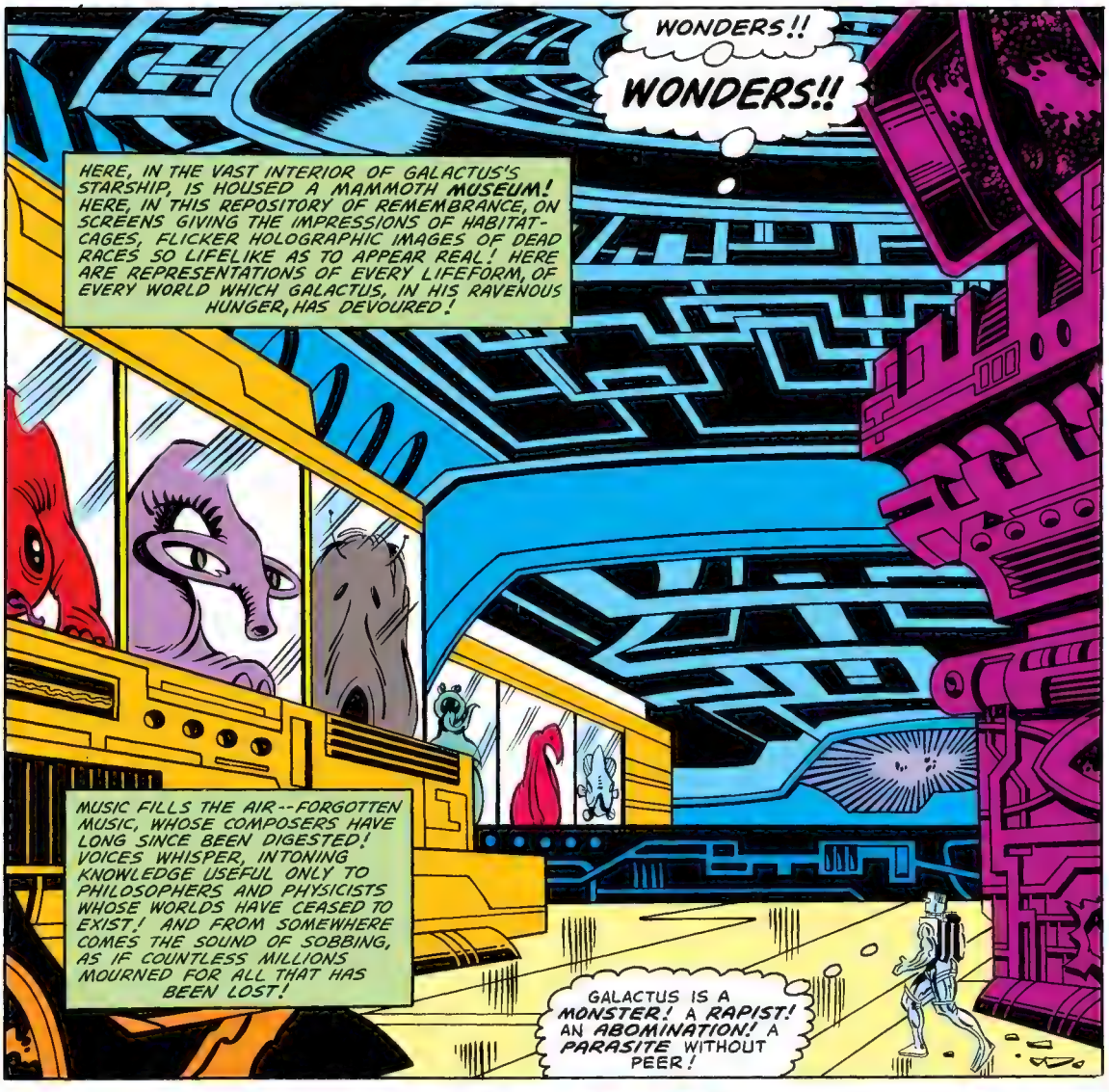
--TOWARDS THE OLD MINE!
BUT WHAT'S THAT THING HANGIN' IN FRONT OF THE ENTRANCE?!
11

I AM THE STAR DISC, HUMAN, WATCHER OVER WRAITH WELFARE, SORCEROUSLY LINKED TO THE BLACK SUN OF THE DIRE WRAITHS' OWN DARK NEBULA!
WHAT HAVE YOU DONE TO MY MOTHER, MY FATHER, MY FRIENDS?!
PREPARED THEM!
PREPARED THEM FOR WHAT?!
FOR THAT--
--WHICH IS ABOUT TO TRANSPIRE!
WRAITHS! STINKIN', SHAPE-SHIFTING, SLIME-SUCKING DIRE WRAITHS!!
YOUR EPITHETS DO US JUSTICE, HUMAN!
WHAT BETTER WAY TO DESCRIBE A RACE THAT ASPIRES TO BE THE SCOURGE OF SPACE?
THE STAR DISC HAS SORCEROUSLY SHIFTED US HITHER FROM OTHER WRAITH-INFILTRATION POINTS ON EARTH, SO THAT CLAIRTON MIGHT BE SUBDUED ONCE AND FOR ALL!
AND SO THAT ROM SHOULD HAVE A MOST UNWELCOME HOMECOMING, SHOULD HE EVER RETURN!
NO! SOMEBODY DO SOMETHING! STOP THEM! HELP!
YOU CAN FORGET HELP, BRANDY! ROM LEFT BROCK JONES HERE-- BETTER KNOWN AS THE TORPEDO-- TO SAFEGUARD CLAIRTON IN HIS ABSENCE!
YOU CAN SEE HOW THAT TURNED OUT! UNABLE TO SEE THROUGH THE WRAITHS' HUMAN DISGUISES, THE TORPEDO FELL TO THEM AS EASILY AS THE REST OF THE TOWN!
EVEN EASIER, HUMAN!
HOW WAS HE TO KNOW THAT THE EERIE FOG THAT APPEARED OUT OF NOWHERE WAS SORCEROUS IN NATURE?
HOW WAS HE TO PREVENT IT FROM ROBBING HIM OF HIS WILL?
12

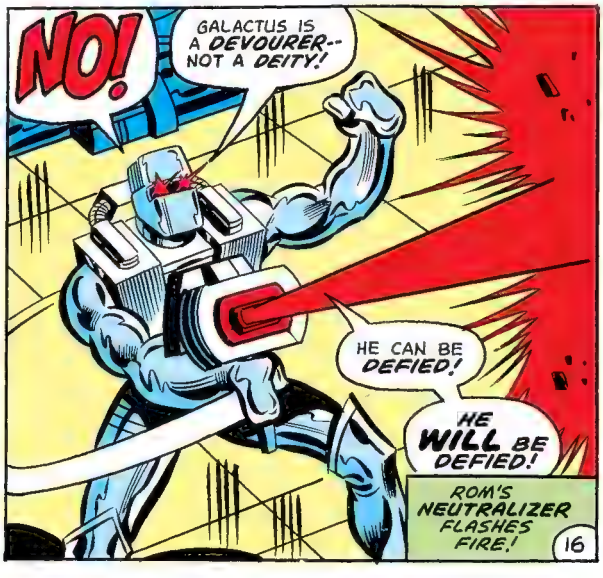
AND, IF HE COULD NOT, HOW SHALL YOU?!
BRANDY!
STEVE!
WH- WHATEVER HAPPENS, I LOVE YOU, HONEY! REMEMBER THAT! NO MATTER WHAT THEY DO TO US-- I LOVE YOU!
BUT, AS THE FOG TOUCHES HIM AND BRANDY, STEVE FORGETS THE VERY MEANING OF THE WORDS HE HAS JUST UTTERED...
...AND BECOMES AS BLANK, AS EMOTIONLESS, AS INCAPABLE OF THOUGHT AS EVERY OTHER CITIZEN OF CLAIRTON-- MAN, WOMAN, AND CHILD!
NOW, YOU MINDLESS AUTOMATONS-- YOU PINK-SKINNED, PALE, PITIFUL FLESHLINGS--
--PROCEED DOWN INTO THE MINES WHICH RUN, MAZE-LIKE, BENEATH YOUR TOWN!
13

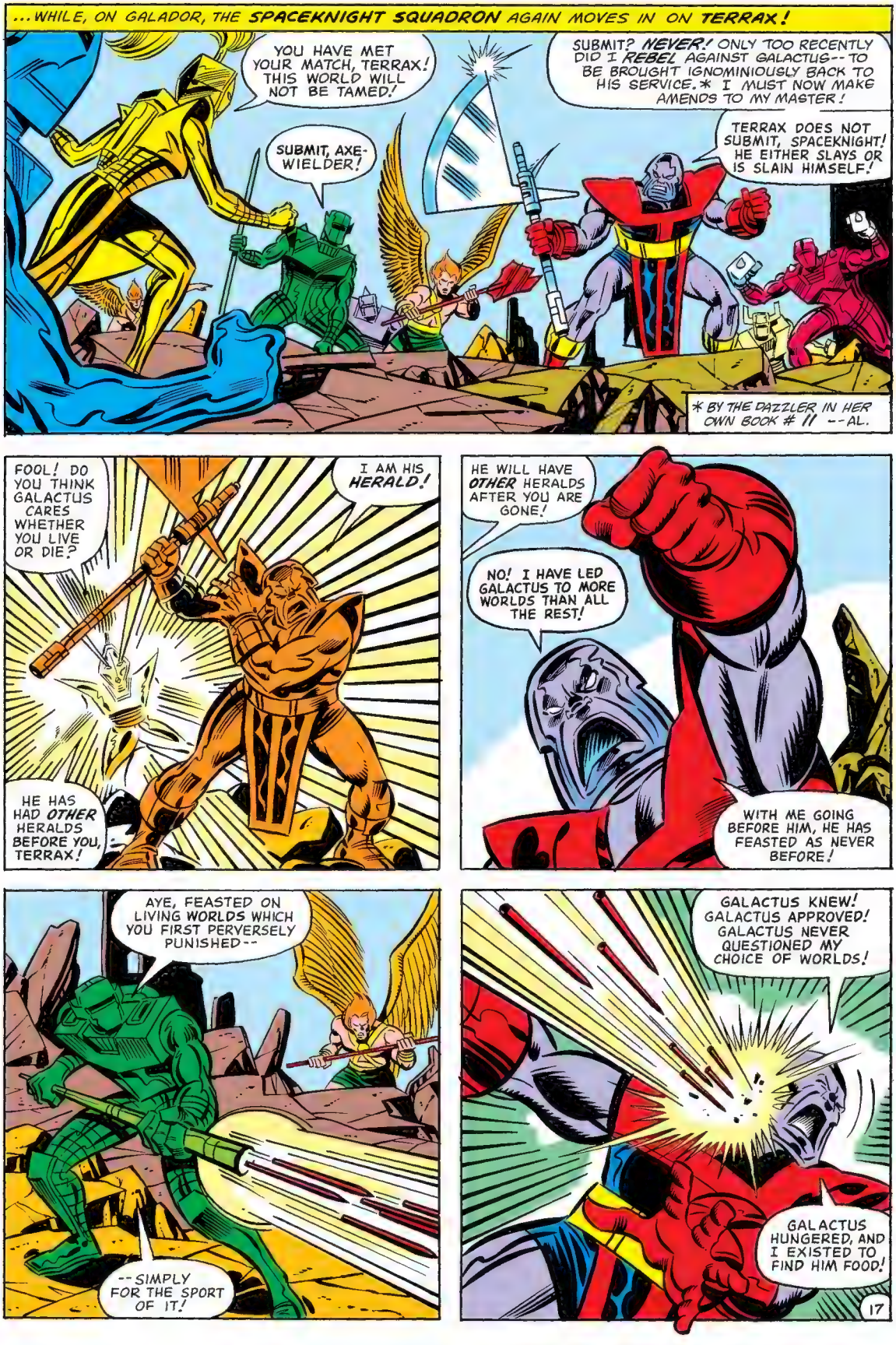

THERE YOU SHALL REMAIN--IMPRISONED--AS HOSTAGES AGAINST ROM'S RETERN, OR FOR ALL ETERNITY SHOULD HE NEVER SET FOOT ON EARTH AGAIN!
GO! HUMAN CATTLE!
THEY GO!
THEY HAVE NO CHOICE...
...NO THOUGHTS TO CALL THEIR OWN!
THESE ARE THE HUMANS WHO RESISTED OUR INFILTRATION FOR SO LONG, WHO SIDED WITH ROM TO ERADICATE OUR WRAITH BRETHREN? THESE?!
IT IS TRULY INCOMPREHENSIBLE, WRAITH BROTHER!
IT SHALL NEVER HAPPEN AGAIN!
CHANGE, WRAITHS! SHED THIS TRANSITORY FORM WHICH MASKS OUR TRUE APPEARANCE!
WREATH YOURSELVES IN TRAPPINGS OF FLESH AND BONE AND HUMAN BLOOD!
UNTIL WE STAND DISGUISED AS THOSE WHOM WE HAVE CAPTURED--INDISTINGUISHABLE FROM THE COMMON CRUSH OF HUMANKIND SAVE BY OUR OWN SORCEROUS SENSES AND BY THE ALL-REVEALING ENERGY ANALYZER OF ROM!
BUT NOT EVEN ROM WOULD THINK TO ANALYZE HIS FRIENDS--
--AND THEREIN LIES HIS DOOM!
14

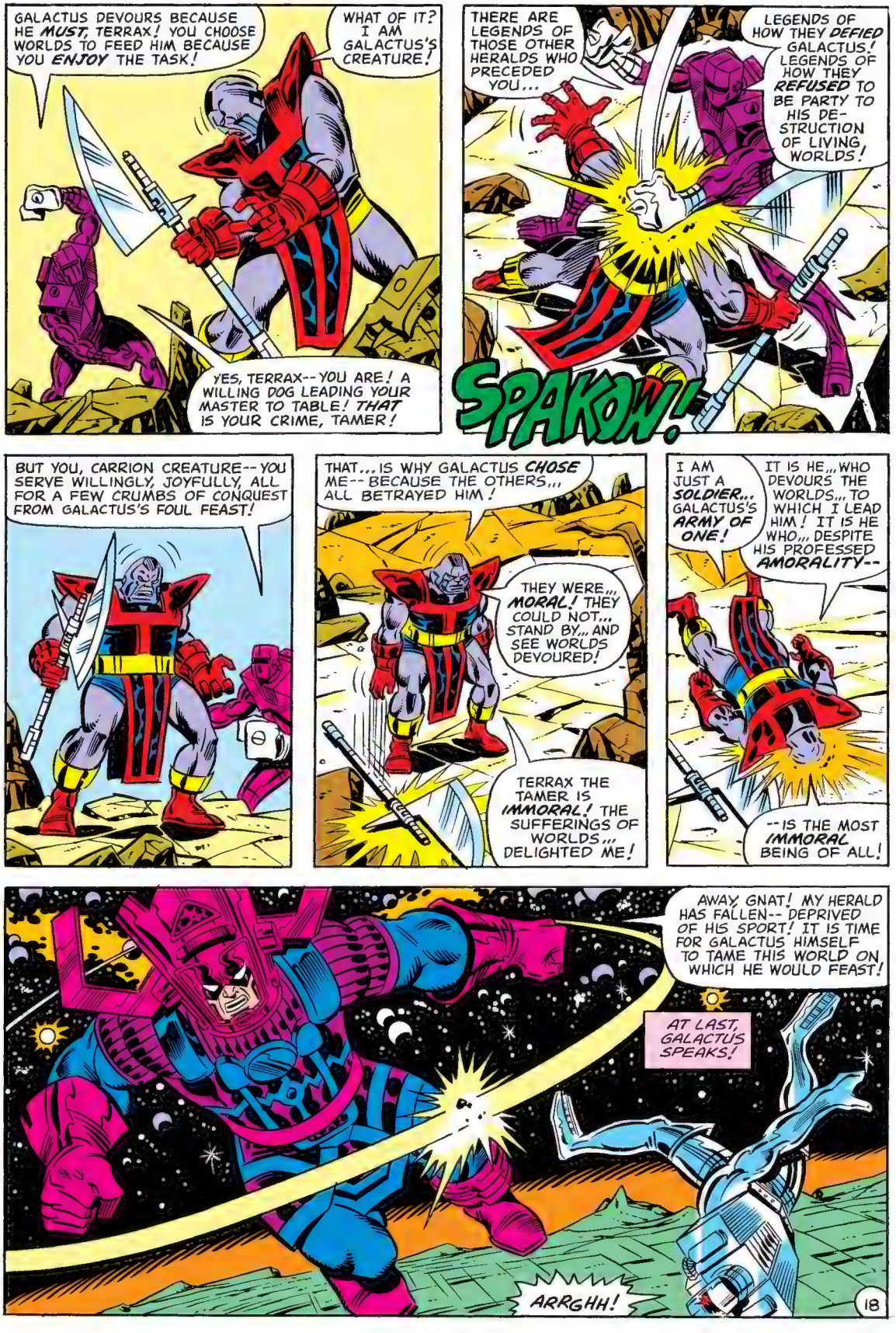

UNAWARE OF THE SNARE BEING SET FOR HIM BACK ON THE PLANET EARTH, THE GREAT SILVER SPACEKNIGHT HAS SOARED CLEAR OF GALADOR'S ATMOSPHERE AND HAS DRAWN NIGH UNTO THE SPRAWLING STARSHIP OF GALACTUS!
SO VAST IS IT THAT IT COULD ENCOMPASS MANY SMALLER WORLDS!
I CANNOT BREACH ITS FORCE-FIELD!
BUT, UNLIKE THE PROTECTIVE FIELD WHICH SAFEGUARDS GALACTUS HIMSELF...
...THIS ONE CAN BE NEUTRALIZED!
FOR A SECOND, A SURGE OF POWER FROM THE AWESOME STARSHIP FLOODS ROM'S CIRCUITRY, STAGGERING THE SILVER CYBORG!
THEN HE RECOVERS AND PROCEEDS ON THROUGH THE BREACH HIS WEAPON HAS MADE IN GALACTUS'S FORCE-FIELD...
...UNTIL, METAL ON METAL, HE LAYS HIS HAND AGAINST THE STARSHIP'S SHIMMERING HULL!
IT IS UNLIKE ANY METAL I HAVE EVER ENCOUNTERED-- ALMOST A SKIN OF LIVING ENERGY.
ALMOST... BUT STILL METALLIC IN STRUCTURE--
--AND WHETHER ENERGY-METAL, LIVING-METAL, OR MERE METAL ITSELF, IT CANNOT DENY ROM ENTRANCE!
SKRAKK!
THERE IS AN ATMOSPHERE WITHIN THE SHIP, UNAFFECTED BY THE HOLE I HAVE MADE IN THE HULL.
THUS I HAVE NO NEED OF MY RESPIRATOR TO CONTINUE FLOODING MY LIVING TISSUE WITH LIFE-GIVING AIR.
BUT WHAT DO I SEE STRETCHING AWAY FROM MY FIELD OF VISION...?
15

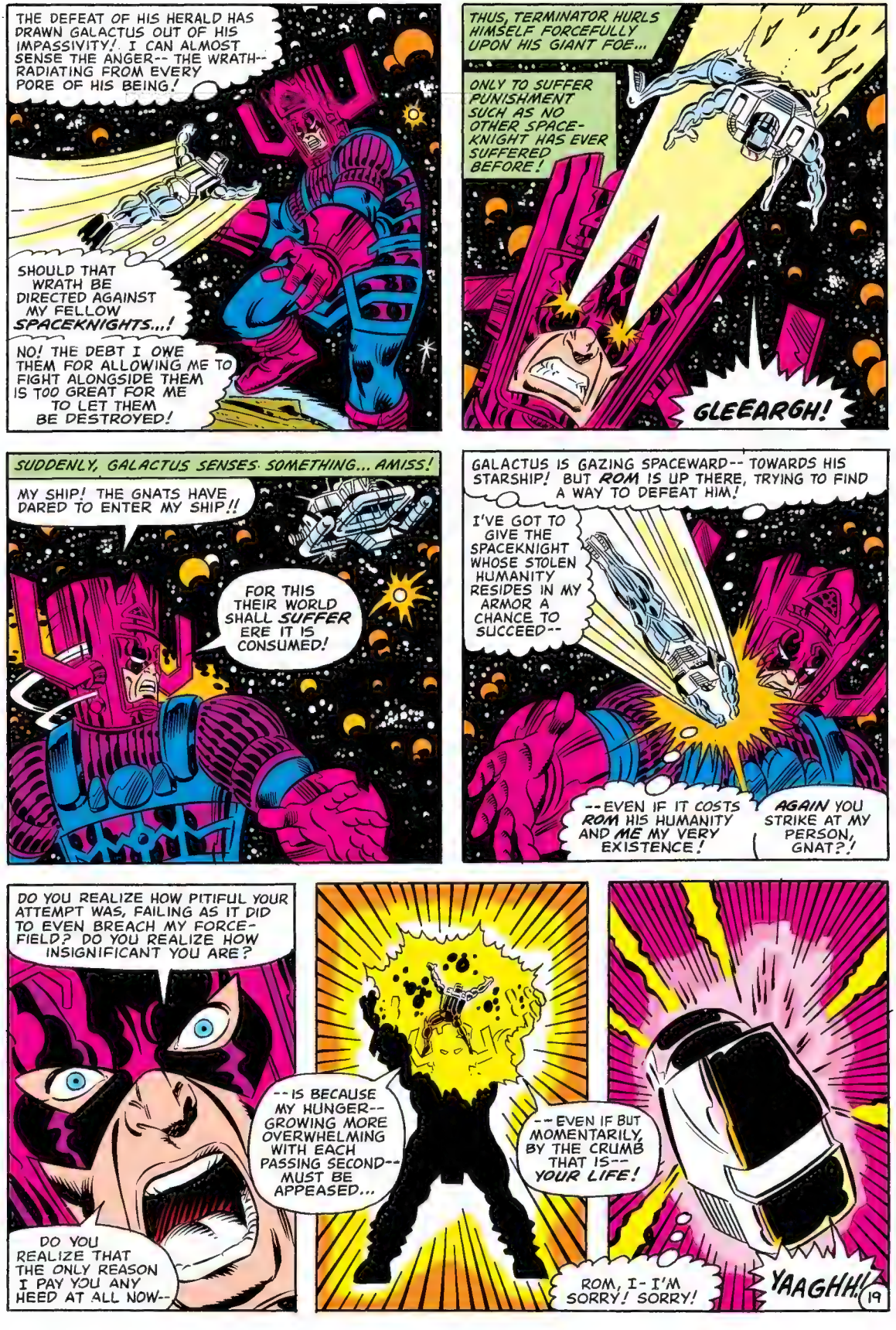

WONDERS!!
WONDERS!!
HERE, IN THE VAST INTERIOR OF GALACTUS'S STARSHIP, IS HOUSED A MAMMOTH MUSEUM! HERE, IN THIS REPOSITORY OF REMEMBRANCE, ON SCREENS GIVING THE IMPRESSIONS OF HABITAT-CAGES, FLICKER HOLOGRAPHIC IMAGES OF DEAD RACES SO LIFELIKE AS TO APPEAR REAL! HERE ARE REPRESENTATIONS OF EVERY LIFEFORM, OF EVERY WORLD WHICH GALACTUS, IN HIS RAVENOUS HUNGER, HAS DEVOURED!
MUSIC FILLS THE AIR--FORGOTTEN MUSIC, WHOSE COMPOSERS HAVE LONG SINCE BEEN DIGESTED! VOICES WHISPER, INTONING KNOWLEDGE USEFUL ONLY TO PHILOSOPHERS AND PHYSICISTS WHOSE WORLDS HAVE CEASED TO EXIST! AND FROM SOMEWHERE COMES THE SOUND OF SOBBING, AS IF COUNTLESS MILLIONS MOURNED FOR ALL THAT HAS BEEN LOST!
GALACTUS IS A MONSTER! A RAPIST! AN ABOMINATION! A PARASITE WITHOUT PEER!

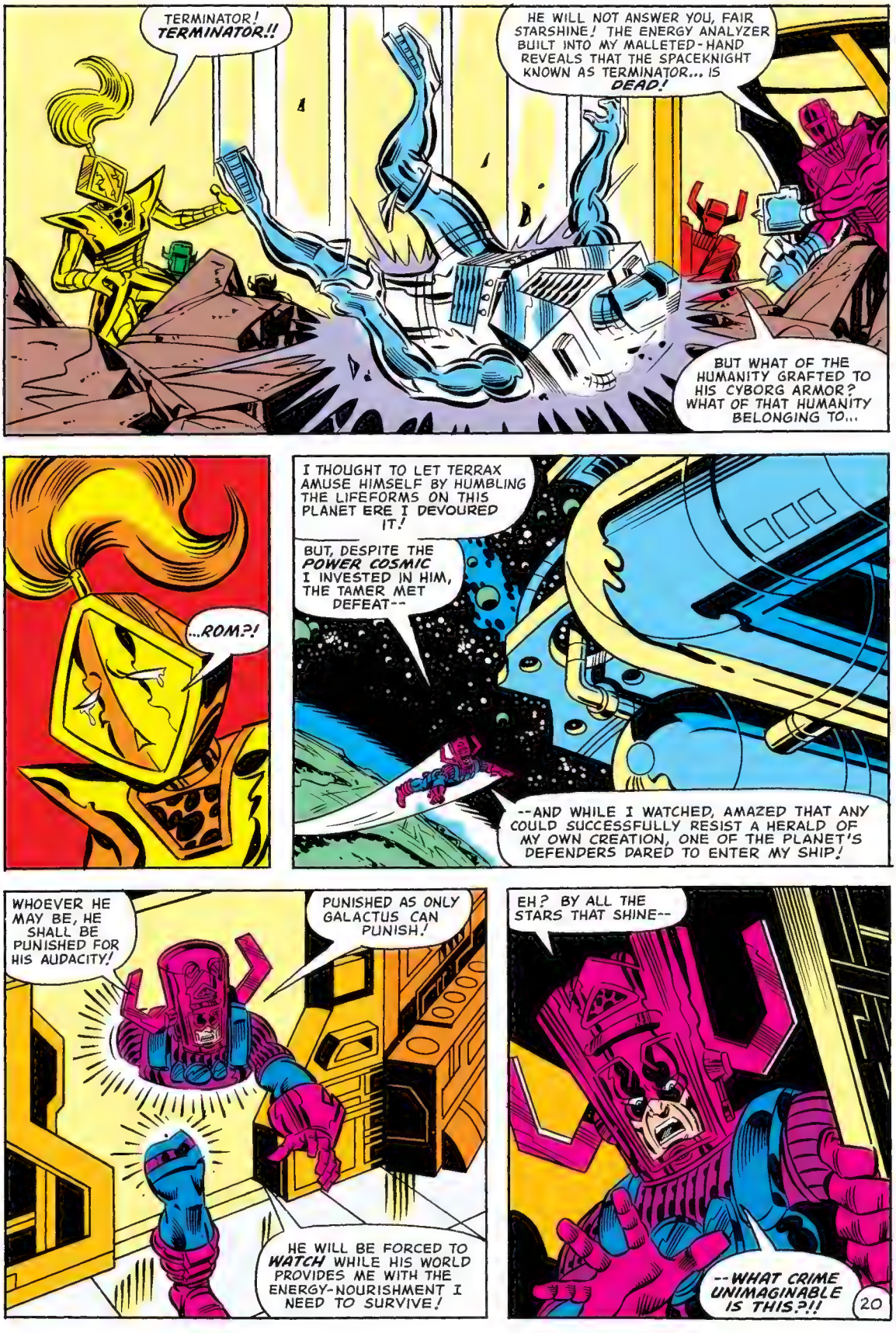
BUT HE IS ALSO A POET WHO WOULD PRESERVE SOME MEMORY OF WHAT HE HAS DESTROYED!
IS THIS TO BE GALADOR'S FATE? IS MY WORLD, TOO, ONE DAY TO PROVIDE GALACTUS WITH A MOMENT'S MORBID MEDITATION--
--WHILE HE MOVES ON TO DEVOUR OTHER DISTANT WORLDS?

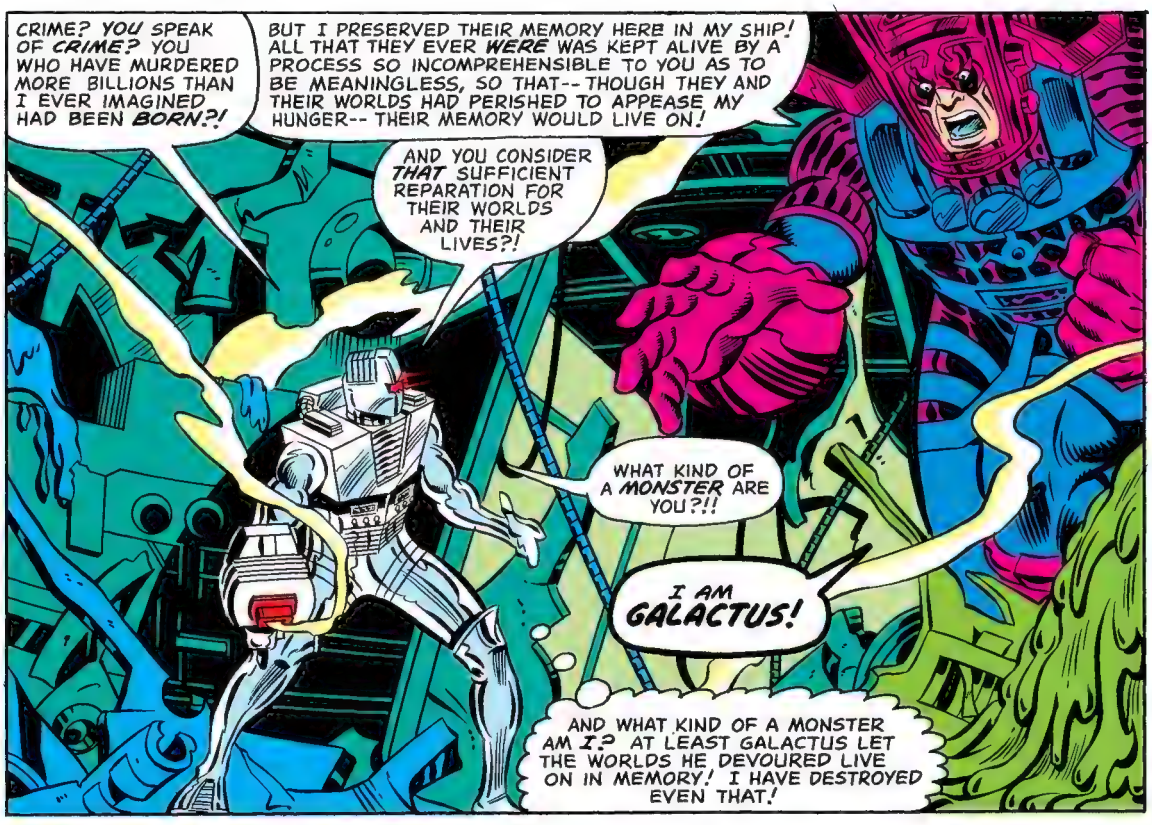

NO!
GALACTUS IS A DEVOURER--NOT A DEITY!
HE CAN BE DEFIED!
HE WILL BE DEFIED!
ROM'S NEUTRALIZER FLASHES FIRE!
16


...WHILE, ON GALADOR, THE SPACEKNIGHT SQUADRON AGAIN MOVES IN ON TERRAX!
YOU HAVE MET YOUR MATCH, TERRAX! THIS WORLD WILL NOT BE TAMED!
SUBMIT, AXE-WIELDER!
SUBMIT? NEVER! ONLY TOO RECENTLY DID I REBEL AGAINST GALACTUS--TO BE BROUGHT IGNOMINIOUSLY BACK TO HIS SERVICE.* I MUST NOW MAKE AMENDS TO MY MASTER!
TERRAX DOES NOT SUBMIT, SPACEKNIGHT! HE EITHER SLAYS OR IS SLAIN HIMSELF!
* BY THE DAZZLER IN HER OWN BOOK # 11 --AL.
FOOL! DO YOU THINK GALACTUS CARES WHETHER YOU LIVE OR DIE?
I AM HIS HERALD!
HE HAS HAD OTHER HERALDS BEFORE YOU, TERRAX!
HE WILL HAVE OTHER HERALDS AFTER YOU ARE GONE!
NO! I HAVE LED GALACTUS TO MORE WORLDS THAN ALL THE REST!
WITH ME GOING BEFORE HIM, HE HAS FEASTED AS NEVER BEFORE!
AYE, FEASTED ON LIVING WORLDS WHICH YOU FIRST PERVERSELY PUNISHED--
--SIMPLY FOR THE SPORT OF IT!
GALACTUS KNEW! GALACTUS APPROVED! GALACTUS NEVER QUESTIONED MY CHOICE OF WORLDS!
GALACTUS HUNGERED, AND I EXISTED TO FIND HIM FOOD!
17


GALACTUS DEVOURS BECAUSE HE MUST, TERRAX! YOU CHOOSE WORLDS TO FEED HIM BECAUSE YOU ENJOY THE TASK!
WHAT OF IT? I AM GALACTUS'S CREATURE!
YES, TERRAX--YOU ARE! A WILLING DOG LEADING YOUR MASTER TO TABLE! THAT IS YOUR CRIME, TAMER!
THERE ARE LEGENDS OF THOSE OTHER HERALDS WHO PRECEDED YOU...
LEGENDS OF HOW THEY DEFIED GALACTUS! LEGENDS OF HOW THEY REFUSED TO BE PARTY TO HIS DESTRUCTION OF LIVING WORLDS!
SPAKOW!
BUT YOU, CARRION CREATURE--YOU SERVE WILLINGLY, JOYFULLY, ALL FOR A FEW CRUMBS OF CONQUEST FROM GALACTUS'S FOUL FEAST!
THAT... IS WHY GALACTUS CHOSE ME-- BECAUSE THE OTHERS,,, ALL BETRAYED HIM!
THEY WERE,,, MORAL! THEY COULD NOT,,, STAND BY,,, AND SEE WORLDS DEVOURED!
TERRAX THE TAMER IS IMMORAL! THE SUFFERINGS OF WORLDS,,, DELIGHTED ME!
I AM JUST A SOLDIER... GALACTUS'S ARMY OF ONE!
IT IS HE,,, WHO DEVOURS THE WORLDS,,, TO WHICH I LEAD HIM! IT IS HE WHO,,, DESPITE HIS PROFESSED AMORALITY--
--IS THE MOST IMMORAL BEING OF ALL!
AWAY, GNAT! MY HERALD HAS FALLEN-- DEPRIVED OF HIS SPORT! IT IS TIME FOR GALACTUS HIMSELF TO TAME THIS WORLD ON WHICH HE WOULD FEAST!
AT LAST, GALACTUS SPEAKS!
ARRGHH!
18

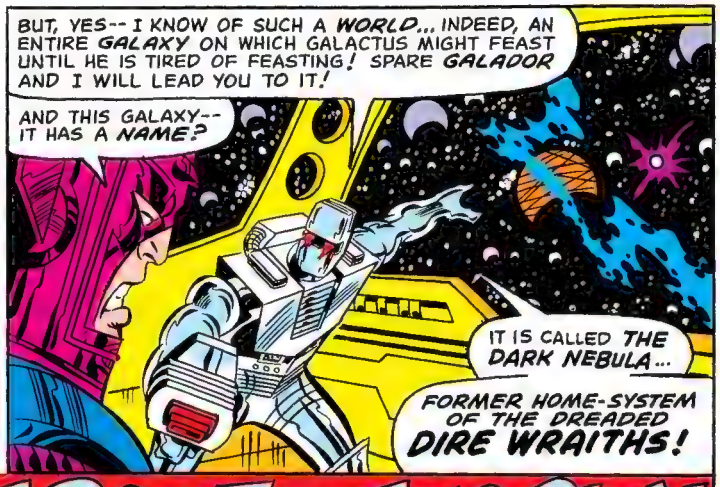

THE DEFEAT OF HIS HERALD HAS DRAWN GALACTUS OUT OF HIS IMPASSIVITY! I CAN ALMOST SENSE THE ANGER-- THE WRATH-- RADIATING FROM EVERY PORE OF HIS BEING!
SHOULD THAT WRATH BE DIRECTED AGAINST MY FELLOW SPACEKNIGHTS...!
NO! THE DEBT I OWE THEM FOR ALLOWING ME TO FIGHT ALONGSIDE THEM IS TOO GREAT FOR ME TO LET THEM BE DESTROYED!
THUS, TERMINATOR HURLS HIMSELF FORCEFULLY UPON HIS GIANT FOE...
ONLY TO SUFFER PUNISHMENT SUCH AS NO OTHER SPACE-KNIGHT HAS EVER SUFFERED BEFORE!
GLEEARGH!
SUDDENLY, GALACTUS SENSES SOMETHING... AMISS!
MY SHIP! THE GNATS HAVE DARED TO ENTER MY SHIP!!
FOR THIS THEIR WORLD SHALL SUFFER ERE IT IS CONSUMED!
GALACTUS IS GAZING SPACEWARD-- TOWARDS HIS STARSHIP! BUT ROM IS UP THERE, TRYING TO FIND A WAY TO DEFEAT HIM!
I'VE GOT TO GIVE THE SPACEKNIGHT WHOSE STOLEN HUMANITY RESIDES IN MY ARMOR A CHANCE TO SUCCEED--
--EVEN IF IT COSTS ROM HIS HUMANITY AND ME MY VERY EXISTENCE!
AGAIN YOU STRIKE AT MY PERSON, GNAT?!
DO YOU REALIZE HOW PITIFUL YOUR ATTEMPT WAS, FAILING AS IT DID TO EVEN BREACH MY FORCE-FIELD? DO YOU REALIZE HOW INSIGNIFICANT YOU ARE?
DO YOU REALIZE THAT THE ONLY REASON I PAY YOU ANY HEED AT ALL NOW--
--IS BECAUSE MY HUNGER-- GROWING MORE OVERWHELMING WITH EACH PASSING SECOND-- MUST BE APPEASED...
--EVEN IF BUT MOMENTARILY, BY THE CRUMB THAT IS-- YOUR LIFE!
ROM, I- I'M SORRY! SORRY!
YAAGHH!
19


TERMINATOR! TERMINATOR!!
HE WILL NOT ANSWER YOU, FAIR STARSHINE! THE ENERGY ANALYZER BUILT INTO MY MALLETED-HAND REVEALS THAT THE SPACEKNIGHT KNOWN AS TERMINATOR... IS DEAD!
BUT WHAT OF THE HUMANITY GRAFTED TO HIS CYBORG ARMOR? WHAT OF THAT HUMANITY BELONGING TO...
...ROM?!
I THOUGHT TO LET TERRAX AMUSE HIMSELF BY HUMBLING THE LIFEFORMS ON THIS PLANET ERE I DEVOURED IT!
BUT, DESPITE THE POWER COSMIC I INVESTED IN HIM, THE TAMER MET DEFEAT--
--AND WHILE I WATCHED, AMAZED THAT ANY COULD SUCCESSFULLY RESIST A HERALD OF MY OWN CREATION, ONE OF THE PLANET'S DEFENDERS DARED TO ENTER MY SHIP!
WHOEVER HE MAY BE, HE SHALL BE PUNISHED FOR HIS AUDACITY!
PUNISHED AS ONLY GALACTUS CAN PUNISH!
HE WILL BE FORCED TO WATCH WHILE HIS WORLD PROVIDES ME WITH THE ENERGY-NOURISHMENT I NEED TO SURVIVE!
EH? BY ALL THE STARS THAT SHINE--
--WHAT CRIME UNIMAGINABLE IS THIS?!!
20


CRIME? YOU SPEAK OF CRIME? YOU WHO HAVE MURDERED MORE BILLIONS THAN I EVER IMAGINED HAD BEEN BORN?!
BUT I PRESERVED THEIR MEMORY HERE IN MY SHIP! ALL THAT THEY EVER WERE WAS KEPT ALIVE BY A PROCESS SO INCOMPREHENSIBLE TO YOU AS TO BE MEANINGLESS, SO THAT-- THOUGH THEY AND THEIR WORLDS HAD PERISHED TO APPEASE MY HUNGER-- THEIR MEMORY WOULD LIVE ON!
AND YOU CONSIDER THAT SUFFICIENT REPARATION FOR THEIR WORLDS AND THEIR LIVES?!
WHAT KIND OF A MONSTER ARE YOU?!!
I AM GALACTUS!
AND WHAT KIND OF A MONSTER AM I? AT LEAST GALACTUS LET THE WORLDS HE DEVOURED LIVE ON IN MEMORY! I HAVE DESTROYED EVEN THAT!

BUT I HAD TO DO IT! ONLY BY WREAKING HAVOC ABOARD HIS SHIP COULD I DRAW HIM AWAY FROM GOLDEN GALADOR! ONLY BY MAKING HIM MOMENTARILY FORGET HIS HUNGER COULD I HOPE TO MAKE HIM THIS PROPOSITION...
LISTEN! IN TIMES PAST IT WAS ALWAYS SAID THAT GALACTUS WOULD PASS A LIVING WORLD IF A DEAD WORLD COULD BE FOUND TO ASSUAGE HIS APPETITE!

YOU KNOW OF SUCH A WORLD NEARBY-- ONE TO WHICH MY HERALD FAILED TO LEAD ME?
YOUR HERALD WISHED TO HUMBLE A LIVING WORLD! UNINHABITED PLANETS PROVIDE NO PLEASURE FOR TERRAX THE TAMER!


BUT, YES-- I KNOW OF SUCH A WORLD... INDEED, AN ENTIRE GALAXY ON WHICH GALACTUS MIGHT FEAST UNTIL HE IS TIRED OF FEASTING! SPARE GALADOR AND I WILL LEAD YOU TO IT!
AND THIS GALAXY-- IT HAS A NAME?
IT IS CALLED THE DARK NEBULA...
FORMER HOME-SYSTEM OF THE DREADED DIRE WRAITHS!

NEXT

TURN ABOUT IS FAIR PLAY

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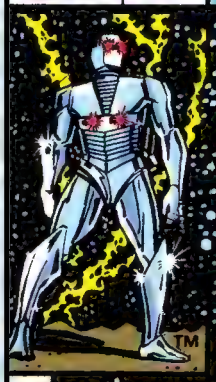

ROM™

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HE COMES-- A SILVER RIDER OF THE SPACEWAYS...

HE SEEKS SUSTENANCE FOR HIS MIGHTY MASTER... GALACTUS.

HE IS... ROM!

MILGROM

Two-hundred years ago, the evil Dire Wraiths threatened the peace-loving planet, Galador. In their homeworld's darkest hour, a thousand brave, young Galadorians sacrificed humanity itself to become Cyborg Warriors, a last desperate line of defense. Though hopelessly outnumbered, these Spaceknights triumphed, and pursued the remnants of the Wraith horde across the universe. Now, alone in the Enemy's mightiest stronghold, on a backward planet called Earth, one Galadorian Warrior faces his most awesome challenge.

STAN LEE PRESENTS: THE GREATEST OF THE SPACEKNIGHTS--ROM!

BILL MANTLO / WRITER | SAL BUSCEMA / ARTIST | JOE SINNOTT / INKER | NOVAK, LETTERS / DON W., COLORS | AL MILGROM / EDITOR | JIM SHOOTER / CHIEF

TURNABOUT IS FAIR PLAY!

GALADORIANS, REJOICE! THE DANGER IS PAST! I HAVE STRUCK A PACT WITH GALACTUS! HE WILL NOT CONSUME OUR WORLD!

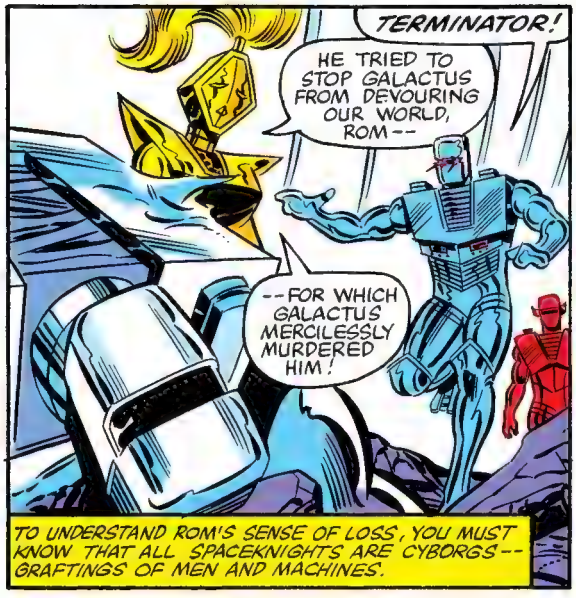
REJOICE, ROM? HOW?! GALACTUS'S HERALD--TERRAX THE TAMER--HAS MADE A RUIN OF GOLDEN GALADOR!

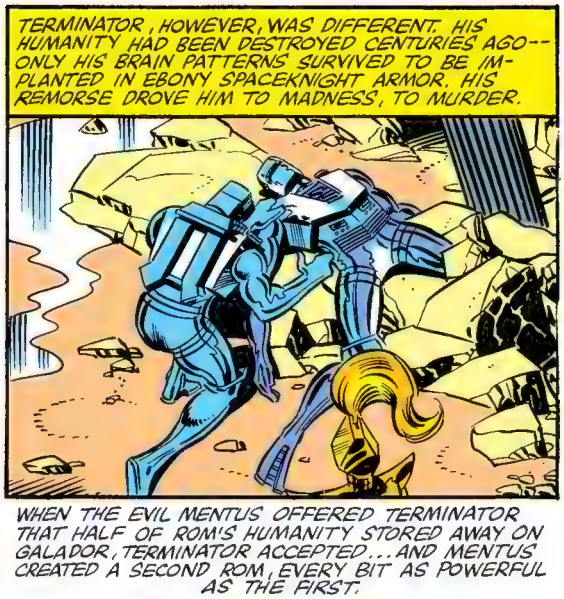
AND GALACTUS HIMSELF HAS TAKEN THE LIVES OF OUR BELOVED PRIME DIRECTOR--

--AND OF OUR STAR-CROSSED FELLOW SPACEKNIGHT, TERMINATOR!

ROM HAD EXPECTED SOME RUINATION OF GALADOR ERE HE COULD STRIKE HIS BARGAIN WITH GALACTUS, BUT DEATH HE HAD HOPED TO AVOID...

...ESPECIALLY THIS DEATH!

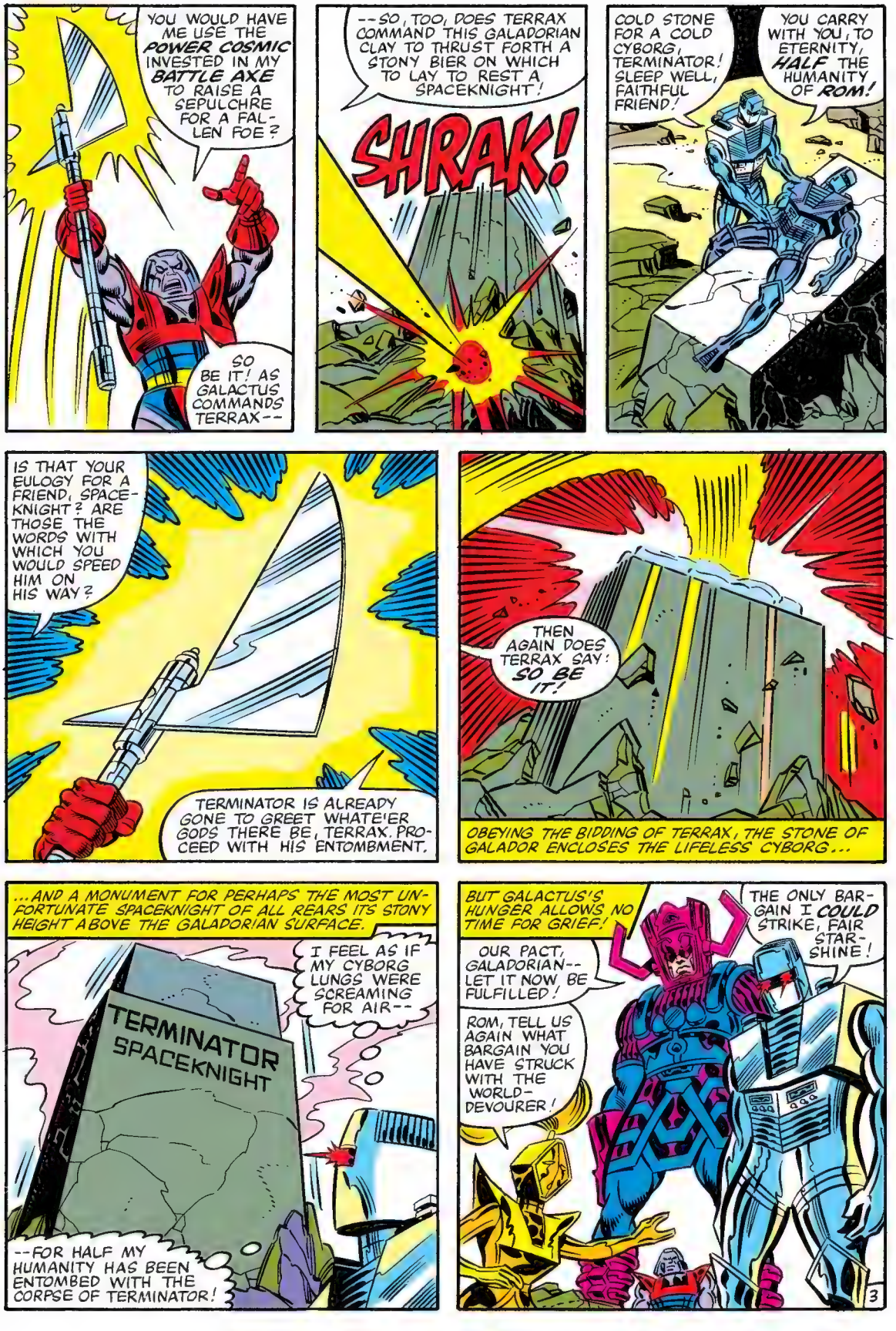

TERMINATOR!
HE TRIED TO STOP GALACTUS FROM DEVOURING OUR WORLD, ROM--
--FOR WHICH GALACTUS MERCILESSLY MURDERED HIM!
TO UNDERSTAND ROM'S SENSE OF LOSS, YOU MUST KNOW THAT ALL SPACEKNIGHTS ARE CYBORGS--GRAFTINGS OF MEN AND MACHINES.

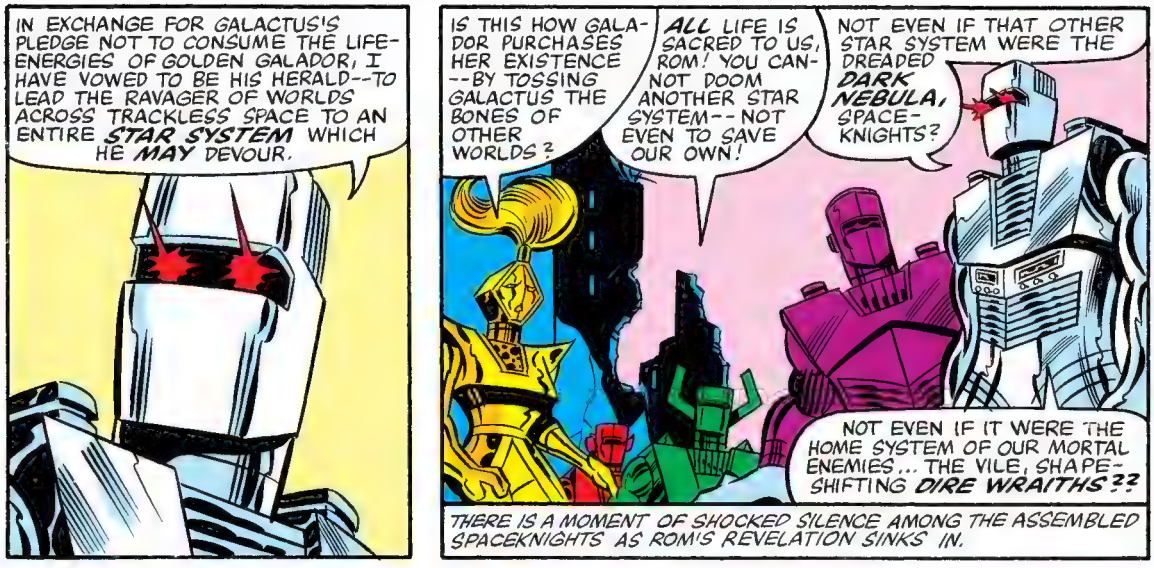

TERMINATOR, HOWEVER, WAS DIFFERENT. HIS HUMANITY HAD BEEN DESTROYED CENTURIES AGO--ONLY HIS BRAIN PATTERNS SURVIVED TO BE IMPLANTED IN EBONY SPACEKNIGHT ARMOR. HIS REMORSE DROVE HIM TO MADNESS, TO MURDER.
WHEN THE EVIL MENTUS OFFERED TERMINATOR THAT HALF OF ROM'S HUMANITY STORED AWAY ON GALADOR, TERMINATOR ACCEPTED...AND MENTUS CREATED A SECOND ROM, EVERY BIT AS POWERFUL AS THE FIRST.

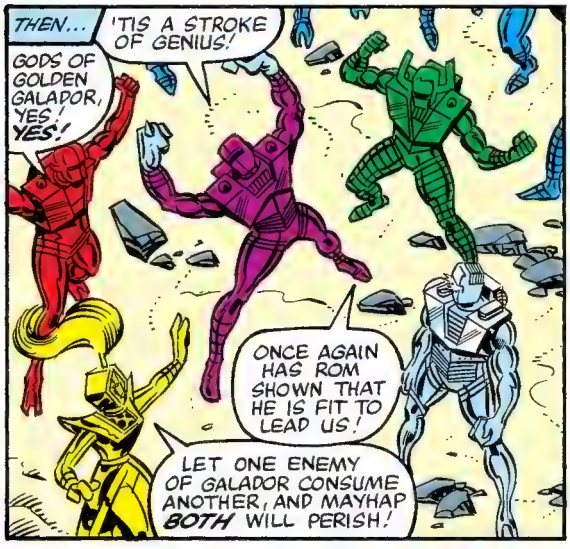
NOW THAT SECOND ROM IS DEAD--SLAIN BY GALACTUS--GONE WITH HIM IS THE TRUE ROM'S HOPE OF EVER BECOMING WHOLLY HUMAN AGAIN.
YOU DID THIS THING?
MY THOUGHTS WERE ELSEWHERE AT THE TIME THE GNAT PENETRATED MY FORCE-SHIELDS AND CAUSED ME PAIN!

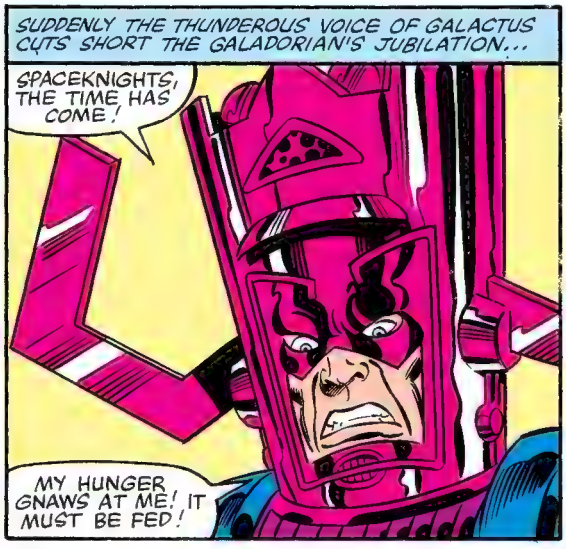
STILL, WE HAVE STRUCK A BARGAIN, YOU AND I--SO I WILL DEMONSTRATE THAT I BEAR NO MALICE, BY INTERRING MY ATTACKER WITH FULL HONORS!
TERRAX!
GALACTUS SUMMONS FORTH HIS HERALD...

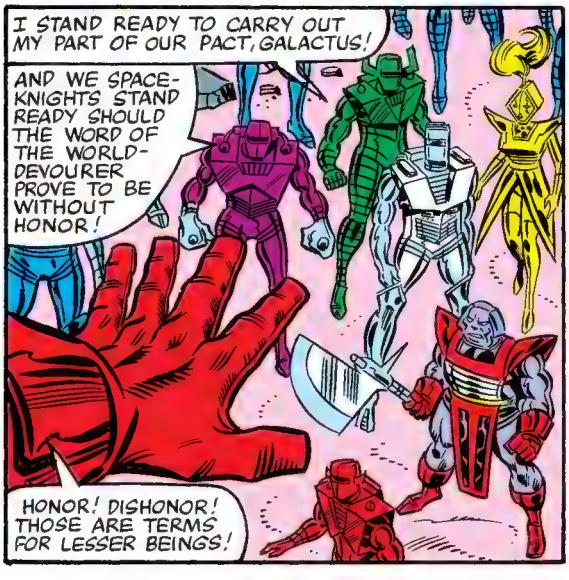
...AND TERRAX THE TAMER BOWS SUBMISSIVELY ON THE SHATTERED SURFACE OF GALADOR.
HOW MAY I SERVE YOU, MASTER?
YOU HAVE ALREADY ILL-SERVED ME, HERALD, BY LEADING ME TO THIS WORLD WHOSE CHAMPIONS STOOD READY TO DENY MY HUNGER!
NOW, MOLDER OF THE MARL, ONE SUCH CHAMPION MUST BE BURIED!
2


YOU WOULD HAVE ME USE THE POWER COSMIC INVESTED IN MY BATTLE AXE TO RAISE A SEPULCHRE FOR A FALLEN FOE?
SO BE IT! AS GALACTUS COMMANDS TERRAX--
--SO, TOO, DOES TERRAX COMMAND THIS GALADORIAN CLAY TO THRUST FORTH A STONY BIER ON WHICH TO LAY TO REST A SPACEKNIGHT!
SHRAK!
COLD STONE FOR A COLD CYBORG, TERMINATOR! SLEEP WELL, FAITHFUL FRIEND!
YOU CARRY WITH YOU, TO ETERNITY, HALF THE HUMANITY OF ROM!
IS THAT YOUR EULOGY FOR A FRIEND, SPACEKNIGHT? ARE THOSE THE WORDS WITH WHICH YOU WOULD SPEED HIM ON HIS WAY?
TERMINATOR IS ALREADY GONE TO GREET WHATE'ER GODS THERE BE, TERRAX. PROCEED WITH HIS ENTOMBMENT.
THEN AGAIN DOES TERRAX SAY: SO BE IT!
OBEYING THE BIDDING OF TERRAX, THE STONE OF GALADOR ENCLOSES THE LIFELESS CYBORG...
...AND A MONUMENT FOR PERHAPS THE MOST UNFORTUNATE SPACEKNIGHT OF ALL REARS ITS STONY HEIGHT ABOVE THE GALADORIAN SURFACE.
TERMINATOR SPACEKNIGHT
I FEEL AS IF MY CYBORG LUNGS WERE SCREAMING FOR AIR--
--FOR HALF MY HUMANITY HAS BEEN ENTOMBED WITH THE CORPSE OF TERMINATOR!
BUT GALACTUS'S HUNGER ALLOWS NO TIME FOR GRIEF!
OUR PACT, GALADORIAN--LET IT NOW BE FULFILLED!
ROM, TELL US AGAIN WHAT BARGAIN YOU HAVE STRUCK WITH THE WORLD-DEVOURER!
THE ONLY BARGAIN I COULD STRIKE, FAIR STARSHINE!
3

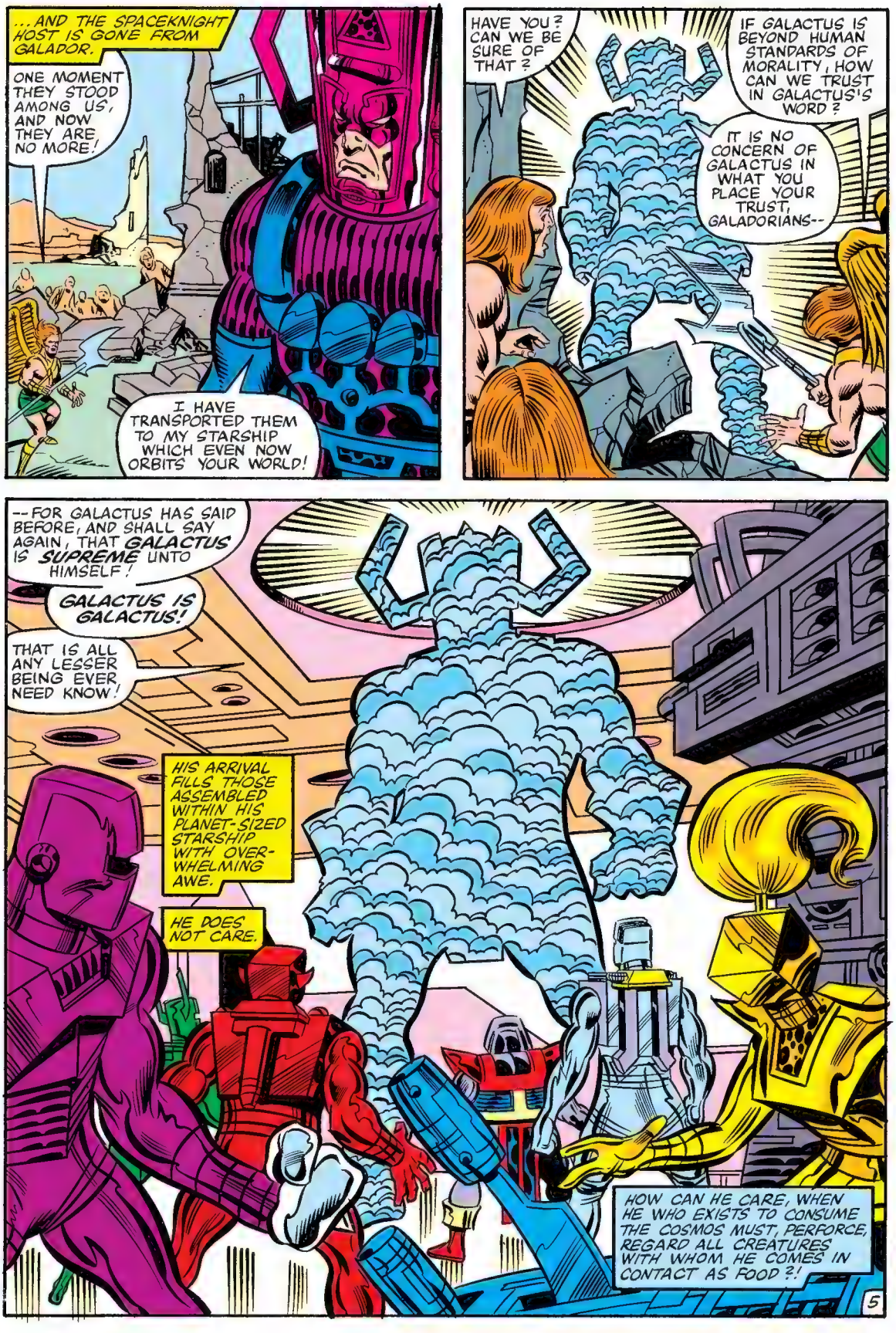

IN EXCHANGE FOR GALACTUS'S PLEDGE NOT TO CONSUME THE LIFE-ENERGIES OF GOLDEN GALADOR, I HAVE VOWED TO BE HIS HERALD--TO LEAD THE RAVAGER OF WORLDS ACROSS TRACKLESS SPACE TO AN ENTIRE STAR SYSTEM WHICH HE MAY DEVOUR.
IS THIS HOW GALADOR PURCHASES HER EXISTENCE --BY TOSSING GALACTUS THE BONES OF OTHER WORLDS?
ALL LIFE IS SACRED TO US, ROM! YOU CANNOT DOOM ANOTHER STAR SYSTEM-- NOT EVEN TO SAVE OUR OWN!
NOT EVEN IF THAT OTHER STAR SYSTEM WERE THE DREADED DARK NEBULA, SPACE-KNIGHTS?
NOT EVEN IF IT WERE THE HOME SYSTEM OF OUR MORTAL ENEMIES... THE VILE, SHAPE-SHIFTING DIRE WRAITHS??
THERE IS A MOMENT OF SHOCKED SILENCE AMONG THE ASSEMBLED SPACEKNIGHTS AS ROM'S REVELATION SINKS IN.

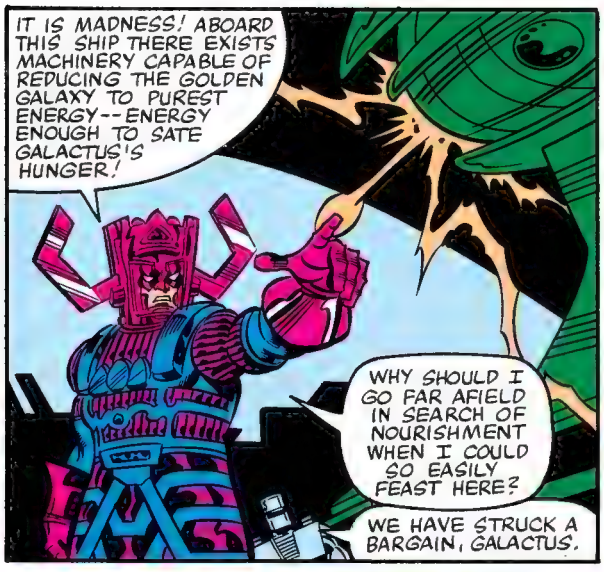

THEN...
'TIS A STROKE OF GENIUS!
GODS OF GOLDEN GALADOR, YES! YES!
ONCE AGAIN HAS ROM SHOWN THAT HE IS FIT TO LEAD US!
LET ONE ENEMY OF GALADOR CONSUME ANOTHER, AND MAYHAP BOTH WILL PERISH!

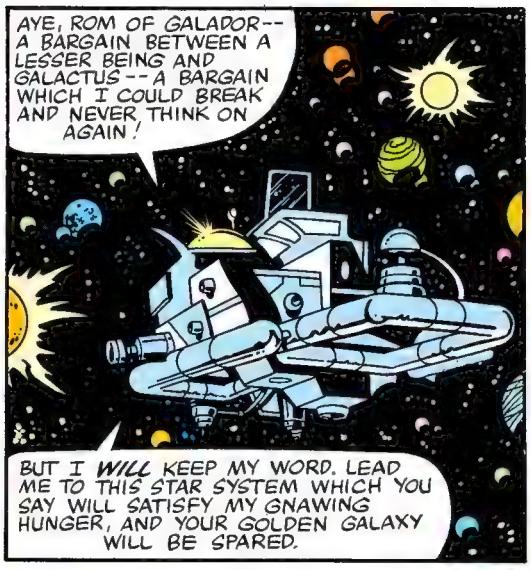

SUDDENLY THE THUNDEROUS VOICE OF GALACTUS CUTS SHORT THE GALADORIAN'S JUBILATION...
SPACEKNIGHTS, THE TIME HAS COME!
MY HUNGER GNAWS AT ME! IT MUST BE FED!

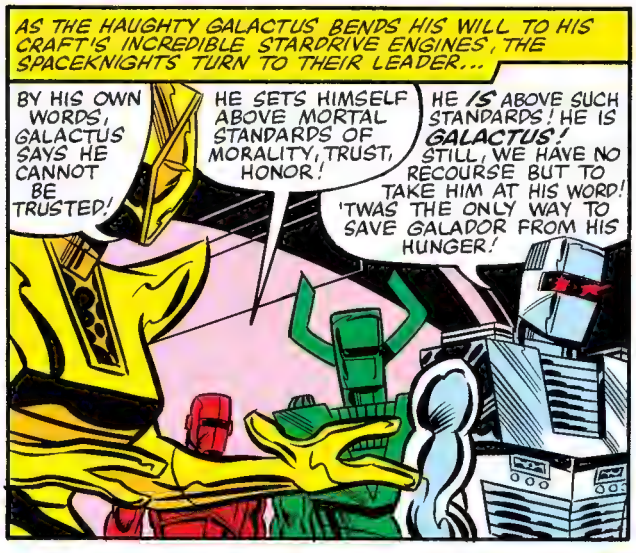

I STAND READY TO CARRY OUT MY PART OF OUR PACT, GALACTUS!
AND WE SPACE-KNIGHTS STAND READY SHOULD THE WORD OF THE WORLD-DEVOURER PROVE TO BE WITHOUT HONOR!
HONOR! DISHONOR! THOSE ARE TERMS FOR LESSER BEINGS!

I AM GALACTUS, A MORALITY UNTO MYSELF! SEEKING TO SHACKLE ME TO STANDARDS OF HONOR--
--IS LIKE TRYING TO YOKE DREAMS TO REASON!
BUT, STILL, GALACTUS HAS GIVEN... HIS WORD!
A GESTURE--A THOUGHT--IS ALL IT TAKES...
4

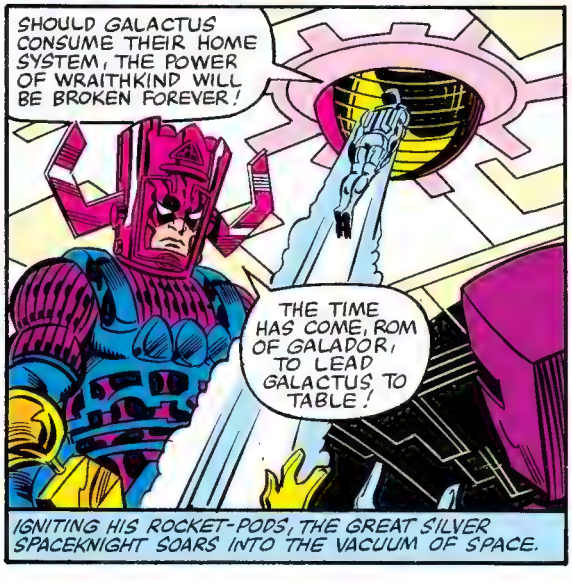

...AND THE SPACEKNIGHT HOST IS GONE FROM GALADOR.
ONE MOMENT THEY STOOD AMONG US, AND NOW THEY ARE NO MORE!
I HAVE TRANSPORTED THEM TO MY STARSHIP WHICH EVEN NOW ORBITS YOUR WORLD!
HAVE YOU? CAN WE BE SURE OF THAT?
IF GALACTUS IS BEYOND HUMAN STANDARDS OF MORALITY, HOW CAN WE TRUST IN GALACTUS'S WORD?
IT IS NO CONCERN OF GALACTUS IN WHAT YOU PLACE YOUR TRUST, GALADORIANS--
--FOR GALACTUS HAS SAID BEFORE, AND SHALL SAY AGAIN, THAT GALACTUS IS SUPREME UNTO HIMSELF!
GALACTUS IS GALACTUS!
THAT IS ALL ANY LESSER BEING EVER NEED KNOW!
HIS ARRIVAL FILLS THOSE ASSEMBLED WITHIN HIS PLANET-SIZED STARSHIP WITH OVERWHELMING AWE.
HE DOES NOT CARE.
HOW CAN HE CARE, WHEN HE WHO EXISTS TO CONSUME THE COSMOS MUST, PERFORCE, REGARD ALL CREATURES WITH WHOM HE COMES IN CONTACT AS FOOD?!
5

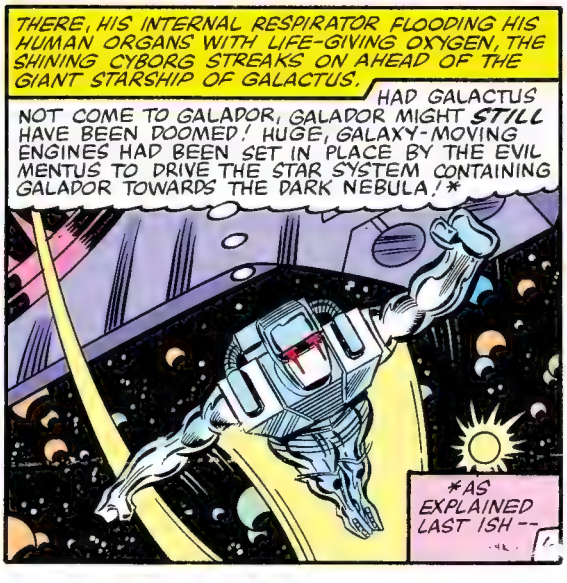

IT IS MADNESS! ABOARD THIS SHIP THERE EXISTS MACHINERY CAPABLE OF REDUCING THE GOLDEN GALAXY TO PUREST ENERGY--ENERGY ENOUGH TO SATE GALACTUS'S HUNGER!
WHY SHOULD I GO FAR AFIELD IN SEARCH OF NOURISHMENT WHEN I COULD SO EASILY FEAST HERE?
WE HAVE STRUCK A BARGAIN, GALACTUS.

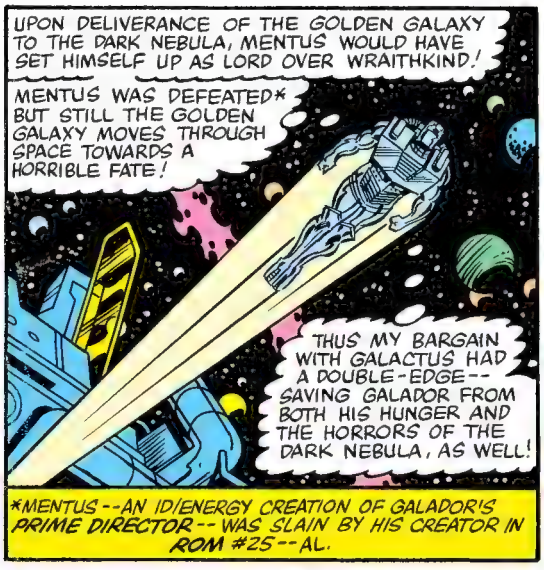

AYE, ROM OF GALADOR--A BARGAIN BETWEEN A LESSER BEING AND GALACTUS--A BARGAIN WHICH I COULD BREAK AND NEVER THINK ON AGAIN!
BUT I *WILL* KEEP MY WORD. LEAD ME TO THIS STAR SYSTEM WHICH YOU SAY WILL SATISFY MY GNAWING HUNGER, AND YOUR GOLDEN GALAXY WILL BE SPARED.

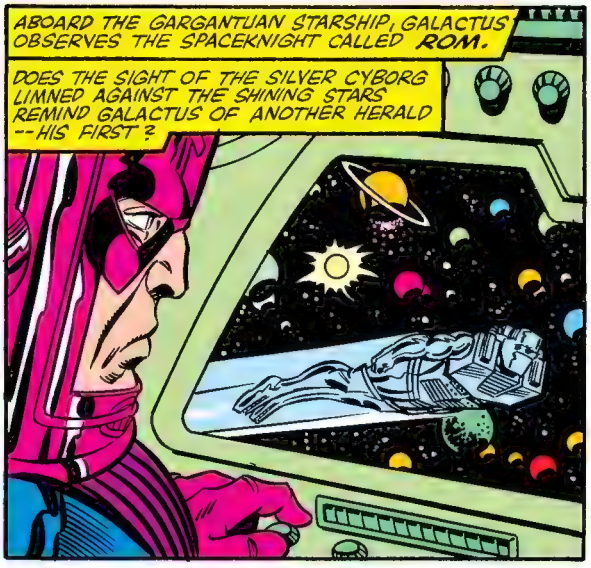

AS THE HAUGHTY GALACTUS BENDS HIS WILL TO HIS CRAFT'S INCREDIBLE STARDRIVE ENGINES, THE SPACEKNIGHTS TURN TO THEIR LEADER...
BY HIS OWN WORDS, GALACTUS SAYS HE CANNOT BE TRUSTED!
HE SETS HIMSELF ABOVE MORTAL STANDARDS OF MORALITY, TRUST, HONOR!
HE *IS* ABOVE SUCH STANDARDS! HE IS *GALACTUS!* STILL, WE HAVE NO RECOURSE BUT TO TAKE HIM AT HIS WORD! 'TWAS THE ONLY WAY TO SAVE GALADOR FROM HIS HUNGER!

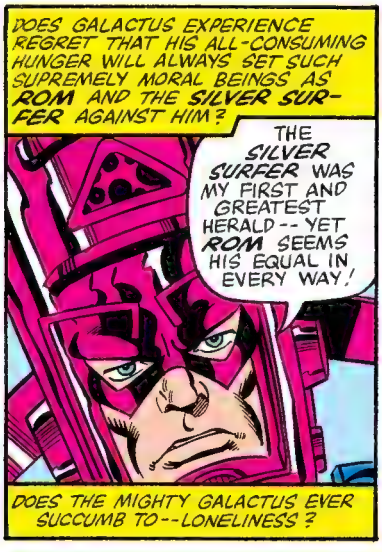
GALADOR! WHAT A PEACEFUL PLANET OURS ONCE WAS! THEN CAME THE *DIRE WRAITHS*--OVER 200 YEARS AGO--HEAPING HORRORS UPON OUR WORLD! WE SPACEKNIGHTS SACRIFICED THAT WHICH WE HELD MOST DEAR--OUR HUMANITY--TO DRIVE WRAITHKIND INTO SPACE...
...WHERE WE HAVE PURSUED THEM EVER SINCE, ERADICATING THEM EVEN AS THEY SEEK TO BREED UPON OTHER WORLDS!
BUT, AS FAST AS WE EXTERMINATE THEM, THEY APPEAR ELSEWHERE, DRAWING NEW POWER FROM THE SORCEROUS *BLACK SUN* OF THEIR DREAD *DARK NEBULA!*


SHOULD GALACTUS CONSUME THEIR HOME SYSTEM, THE POWER OF WRAITHKIND WILL BE BROKEN FOREVER!
THE TIME HAS COME, ROM OF GALADOR, TO LEAD GALACTUS TO TABLE!
IGNITING HIS ROCKET-PODS, THE GREAT SILVER SPACEKNIGHT SOARS INTO THE VACUUM OF SPACE.

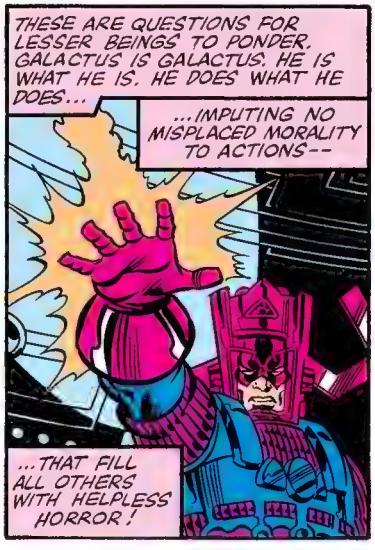

THERE, HIS INTERNAL RESPIRATOR FLOODING HIS HUMAN ORGANS WITH LIFE-GIVING OXYGEN, THE SHINING CYBORG STREAKS ON AHEAD OF THE GIANT STARSHIP OF GALACTUS.
HAD GALACTUS NOT COME TO GALADOR, GALADOR MIGHT *STILL* HAVE BEEN DOOMED! HUGE, GALAXY-MOVING ENGINES HAD BEEN SET IN PLACE BY THE EVIL MENTUS TO DRIVE THE STAR SYSTEM CONTAINING GALADOR TOWARDS THE DARK NEBULA!*
*AS EXPLAINED LAST ISH--

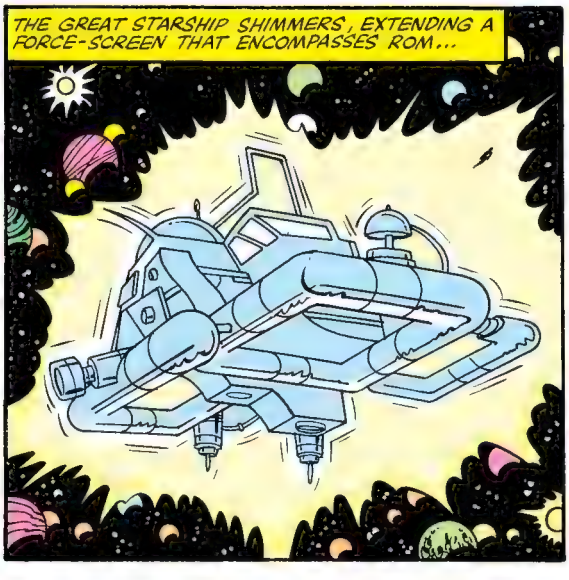

UPON DELIVERANCE OF THE GOLDEN GALAXY TO THE DARK NEBULA, MENTUS WOULD HAVE SET HIMSELF UP AS LORD OVER WRAITHKIND!
MENTUS WAS DEFEATED* BUT STILL THE GOLDEN GALAXY MOVES THROUGH SPACE TOWARDS A HORRIBLE FATE!
THUS MY BARGAIN WITH GALACTUS HAD A DOUBLE-EDGE-- SAVING GALADOR FROM BOTH HIS HUNGER AND THE HORRORS OF THE DARK NEBULA, AS WELL!
*MENTUS--AN ID/ENERGY CREATION OF GALADOR'S PRIME DIRECTOR--WAS SLAIN BY HIS CREATOR IN ROM #25--AL.


ABOARD THE GARGANTUAN STARSHIP, GALACTUS OBSERVES THE SPACEKNIGHT CALLED ROM.
DOES THE SIGHT OF THE SILVER CYBORG LIMNED AGAINST THE SHINING STARS REMIND GALACTUS OF ANOTHER HERALD --HIS FIRST?

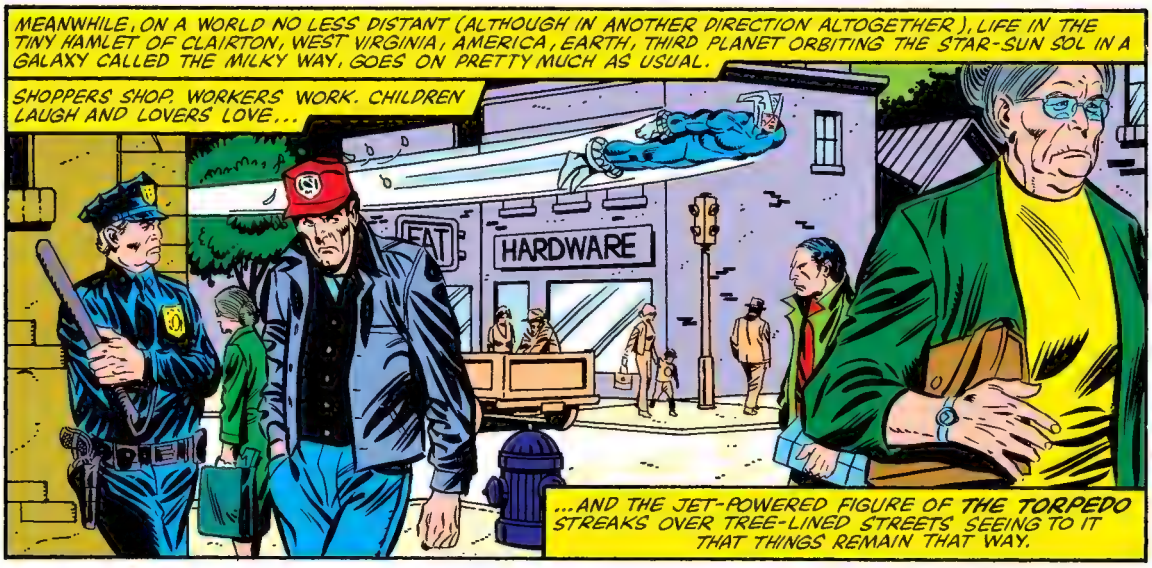

DOES GALACTUS EXPERIENCE REGRET THAT HIS ALL-CONSUMING HUNGER WILL ALWAYS SET SUCH SUPREMELY MORAL BEINGS AS ROM AND THE SILVER SURFER AGAINST HIM?
THE SILVER SURFER WAS MY FIRST AND GREATEST HERALD -- YET ROM SEEMS HIS EQUAL IN EVERY WAY!
DOES THE MIGHTY GALACTUS EVER SUCCUMB TO--LONELINESS?

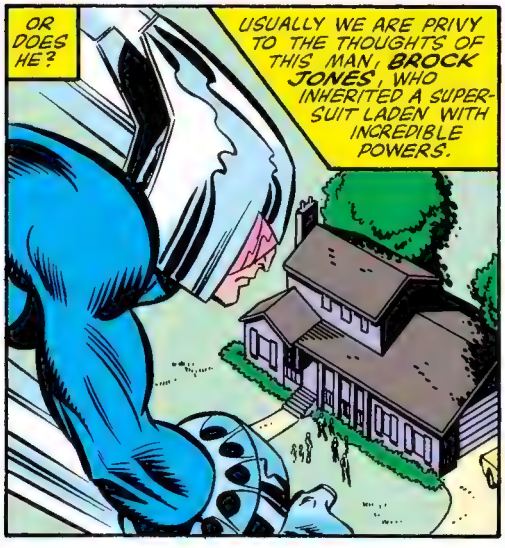
I HAVE LED GALACTUS TO FEAST ON MORE WORLDS THAN ALL HIS OTHER HERALDS COMBINED, YET NEVER HAS HE REGARDED ME WITH THE FAVOR HE RESERVES FOR THEM!
DOES THE SUPREMELY POWERFUL GALACTUS EVER WORRY AT THE RESENTMENT OF HIS SERVANT?

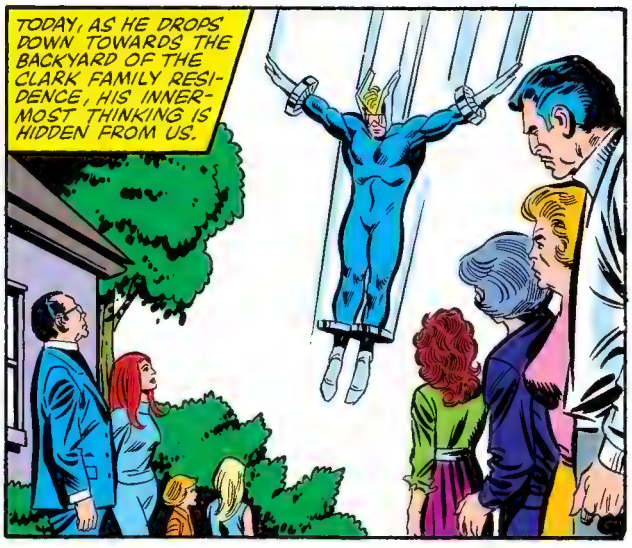

THESE ARE QUESTIONS FOR LESSER BEINGS TO PONDER. GALACTUS IS GALACTUS. HE IS WHAT HE IS. HE DOES WHAT HE DOES...
...IMPUTING NO MISPLACED MORALITY TO ACTIONS--
...THAT FILL ALL OTHERS WITH HELPLESS HORROR!

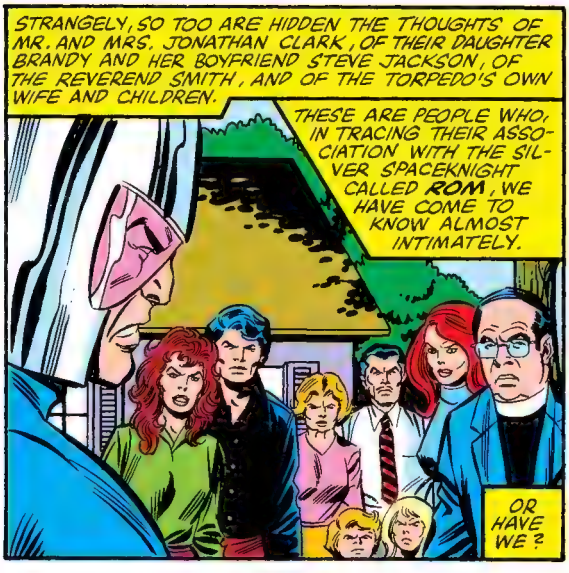

THE GREAT STARSHIP SHIMMERS, EXTENDING A FORCE-SCREEN THAT ENCOMPASSES ROM...

...AND, SO SHIELDED, BOTH PASS INTO HYPERSPACE, FORGING THROUGH THE VOID TOWARDS THE DREADED DARK NEBULA SO MANY LIGHT YEARS AWAY!
7

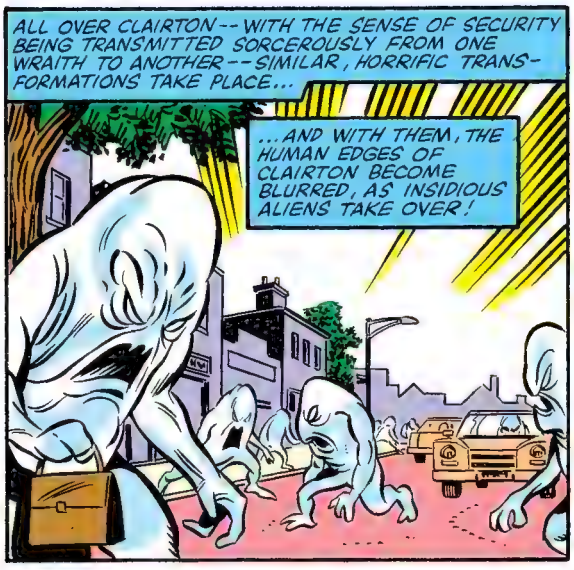

MEANWHILE, ON A WORLD NO LESS DISTANT (ALTHOUGH IN ANOTHER DIRECTION ALTOGETHER), LIFE IN THE TINY HAMLET OF CLAIRTON, WEST VIRGINIA, AMERICA, EARTH, THIRD PLANET ORBITING THE STAR-SUN SOL IN A GALAXY CALLED THE MILKY WAY, GOES ON PRETTY MUCH AS USUAL.
SHOPPERS SHOP. WORKERS WORK. CHILDREN LAUGH AND LOVERS LOVE...
EAT
HARDWARE
...AND THE JET-POWERED FIGURE OF THE TORPEDO STREAKS OVER TREE-LINED STREETS SEEING TO IT THAT THINGS REMAIN THAT WAY.

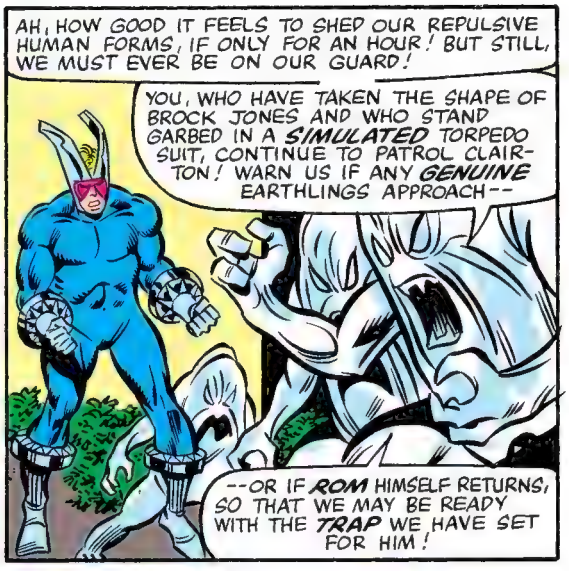

OR DOES HE?
USUALLY WE ARE PRIVY TO THE THOUGHTS OF THIS MAN, BROCK JONES, WHO INHERITED A SUPER-SUIT LADEN WITH INCREDIBLE POWERS.

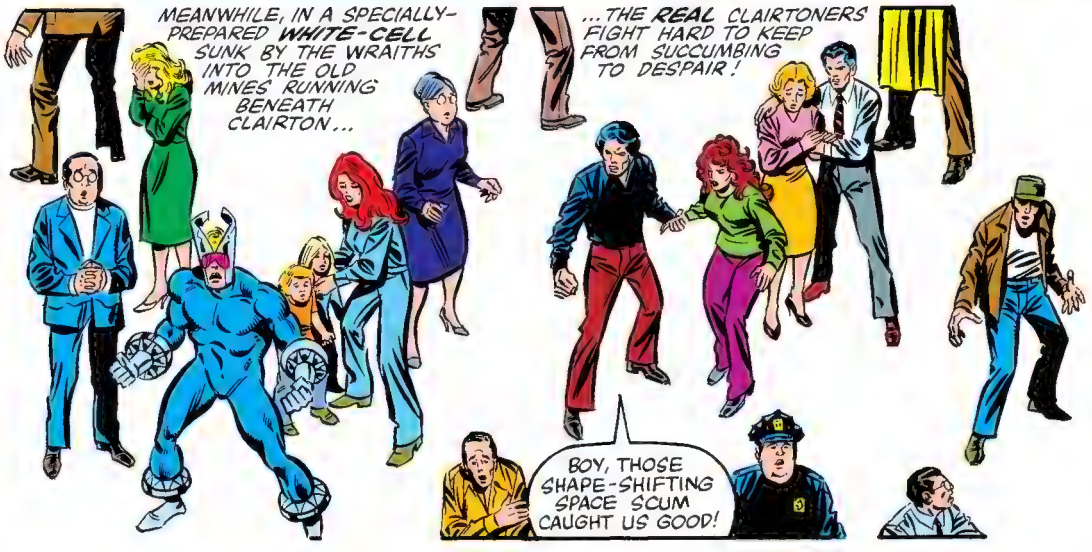

TODAY, AS HE DROPS DOWN TOWARDS THE BACKYARD OF THE CLARK FAMILY RESIDENCE, HIS INNERMOST THINKING IS HIDDEN FROM US.


STRANGELY, SO TOO ARE HIDDEN THE THOUGHTS OF MR. AND MRS. JONATHAN CLARK, OF THEIR DAUGHTER BRANDY AND HER BOYFRIEND STEVE JACKSON, OF THE REVEREND SMITH, AND OF THE TORPEDO'S OWN WIFE AND CHILDREN.
THESE ARE PEOPLE WHO, IN TRACING THEIR ASSOCIATION WITH THE SILVER SPACEKNIGHT CALLED ROM, WE HAVE COME TO KNOW ALMOST INTIMATELY.
OR HAVE WE?

SURELY, THEN, WE SHOULD HAVE SENSED THAT, DESPITE THEIR FAMILIAR APPEARANCE, THOSE PEOPLE ASSEMBLED BEFORE US ARE NOT WHO THEY PURPORT TO BE.
THERE ARE NO OUTSIDERS IN CLAIRTON! IT IS SAFE TO SHED OUR HUMAN DISGUISES!
INDEED, THEY ARE NOT PEOPLE AT ALL... BUT DIRE WRAITHS!
8

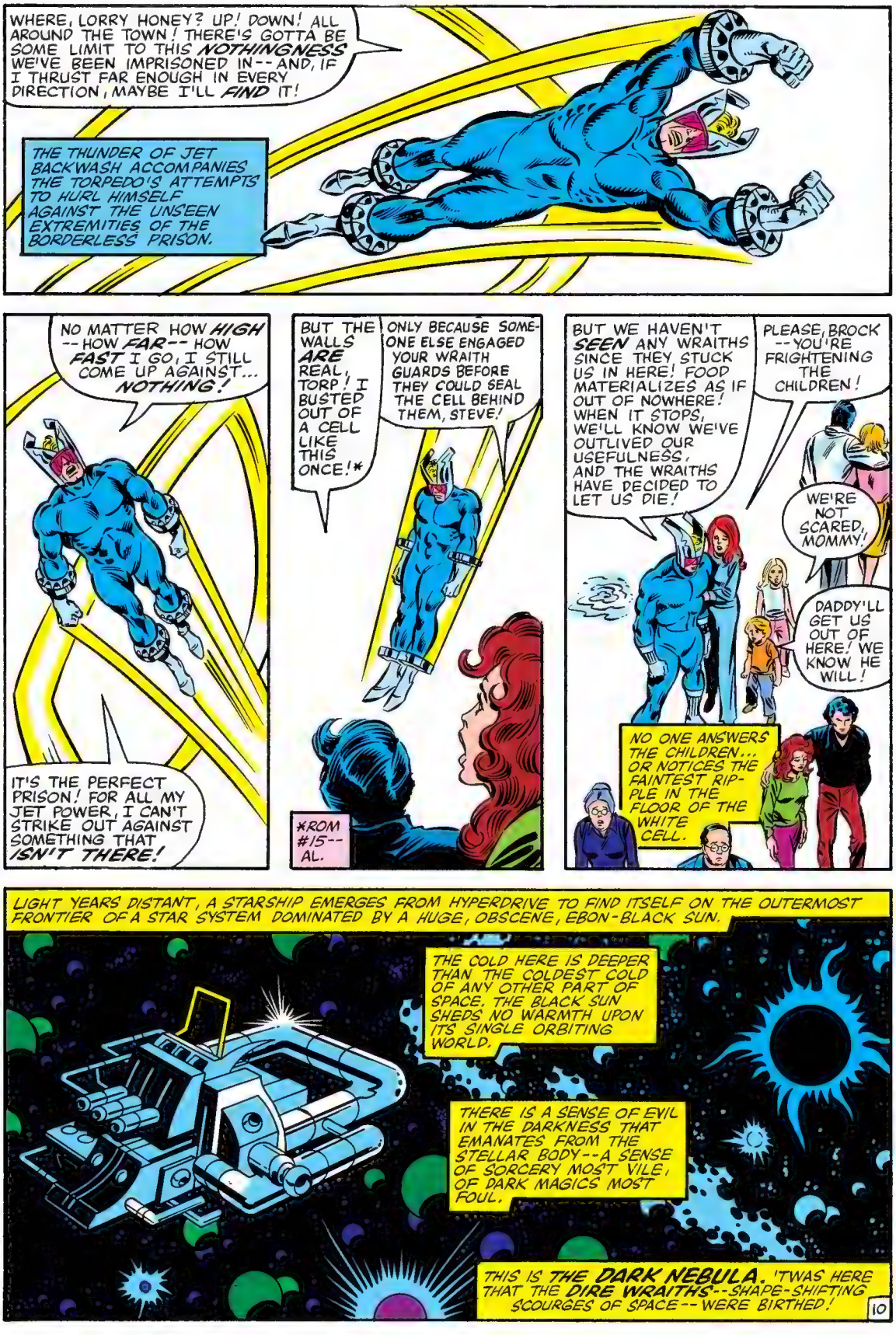

ALL OVER CLAIRTON--WITH THE SENSE OF SECURITY BEING TRANSMITTED SORCEROUSLY FROM ONE WRAITH TO ANOTHER--SIMILAR, HORRIFIC TRANSFORMATIONS TAKE PLACE...
...AND WITH THEM, THE HUMAN EDGES OF CLAIRTON BECOME BLURRED, AS INSIDIOUS ALIENS TAKE OVER!

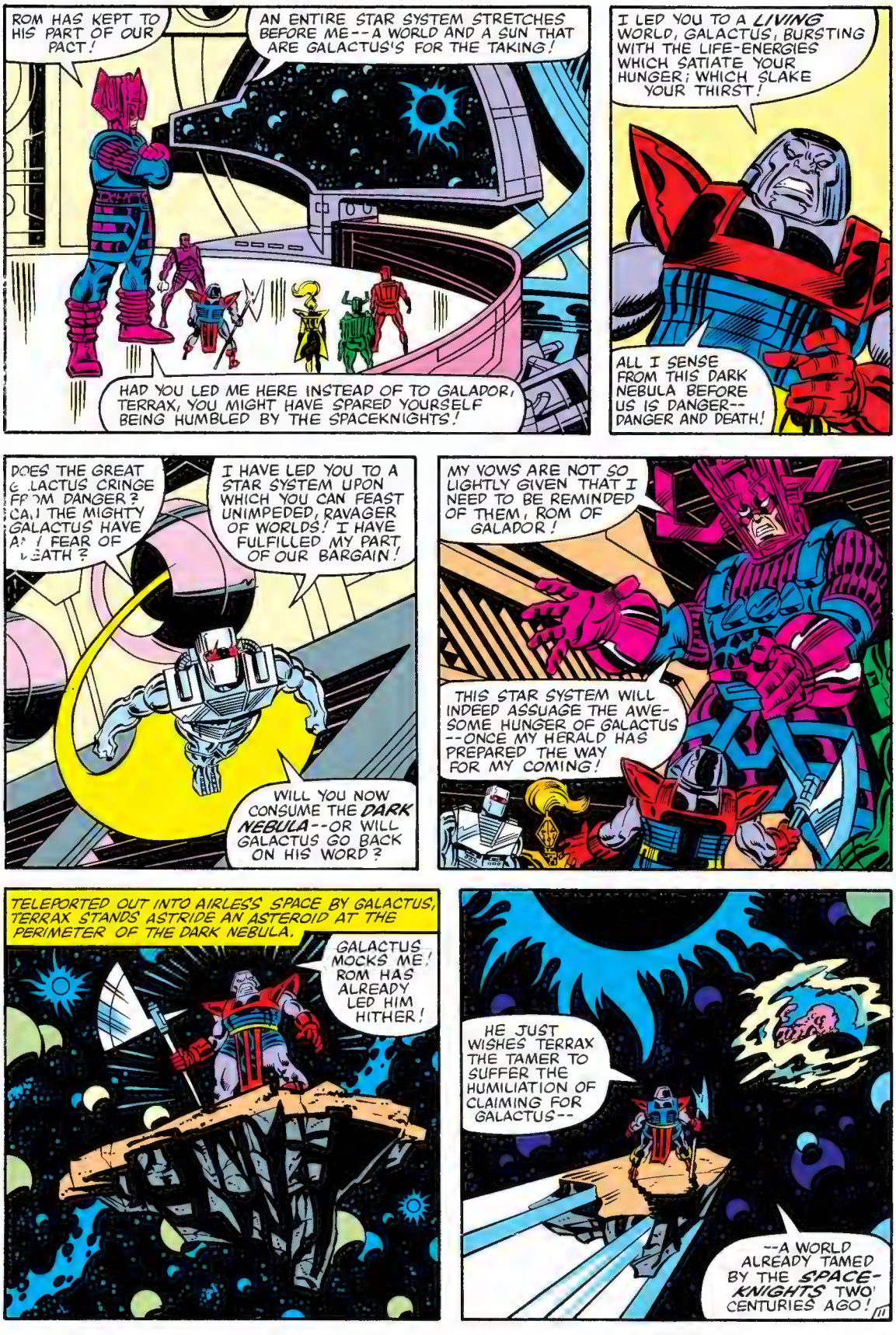

AH, HOW GOOD IT FEELS TO SHED OUR REPULSIVE HUMAN FORMS, IF ONLY FOR AN HOUR! BUT STILL, WE MUST EVER BE ON OUR GUARD!
YOU, WHO HAVE TAKEN THE SHAPE OF BROCK JONES AND WHO STAND GARBED IN A SIMULATED TORPEDO SUIT, CONTINUE TO PATROL CLAIRTON! WARN US IF ANY GENUINE EARTHLINGS APPROACH--
--OR IF ROM HIMSELF RETURNS, SO THAT WE MAY BE READY WITH THE TRAP WE HAVE SET FOR HIM!


MEANWHILE, IN A SPECIALLY-PREPARED WHITE-CELL SUNK BY THE WRAITHS INTO THE OLD MINES RUNNING BENEATH CLAIRTON...
...THE REAL CLAIRTONERS FIGHT HARD TO KEEP FROM SUCCUMBING TO DESPAIR!
BOY, THOSE SHAPE-SHIFTING SPACE SCUM CAUGHT US GOOD!

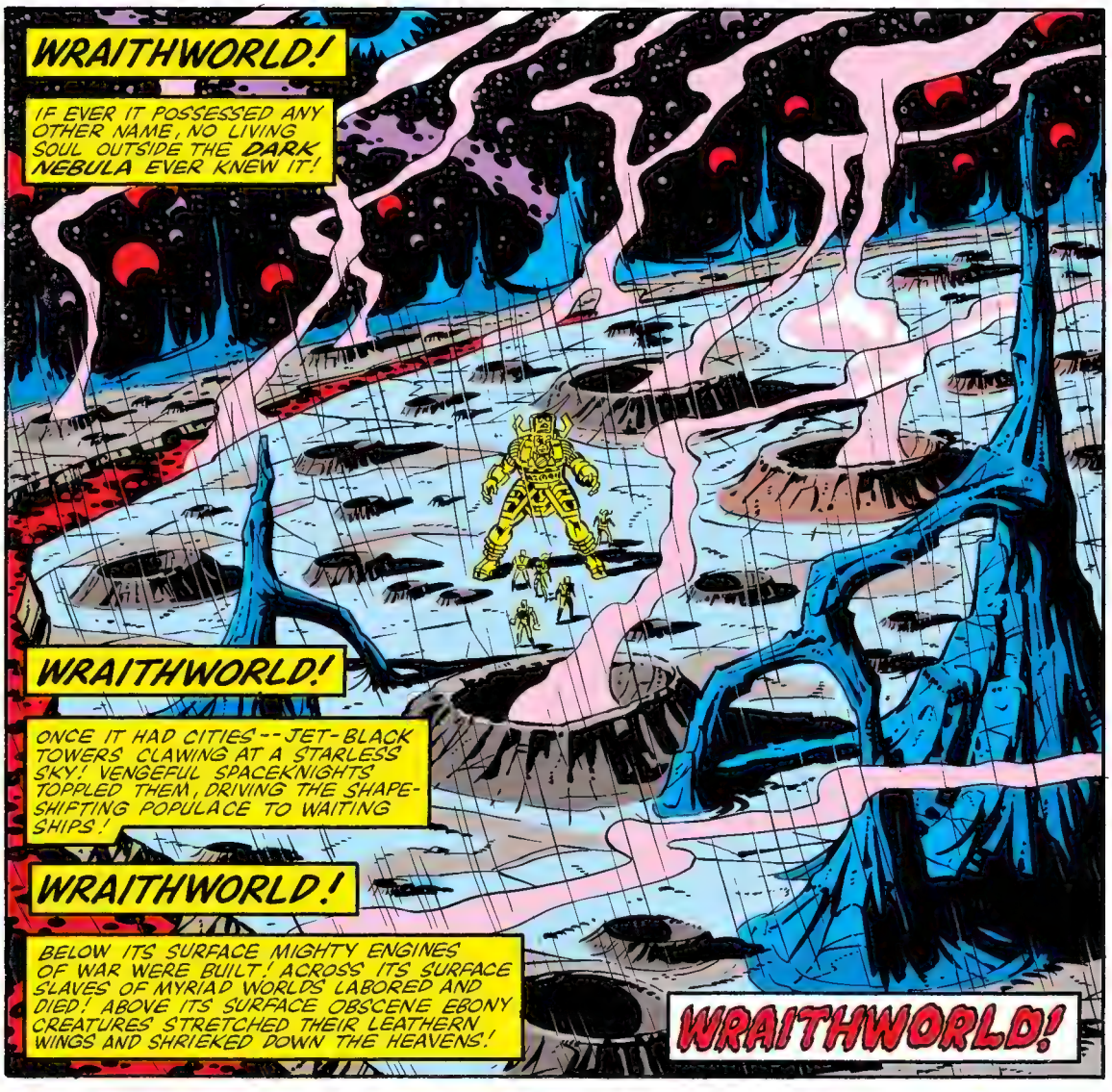
THEIR FOG WAFTED OVER THE TOWN--STEALING OUR WILLS--AND THEN THEY STUCK US ALL DOWN HERE WHILE TAKING OUR PLACES TO PREPARE AN AMBUSH FOR ROM!
STILL, BRANDY, I SHOULD HAVE GUESSED SOMETHING WAS WRONG--
ROM LEFT YOU TO WATCH OVER CLAIRTON, TORPEDO! YOU SURE FELL ASLEEP AT THE SWITCH!
STEVE, YOU'RE NOT BEING FAIR! THE TORPEDO CAN'T SEE THROUGH THE WRAITH'S HUMAN DISGUISES! NONE OF US CAN!

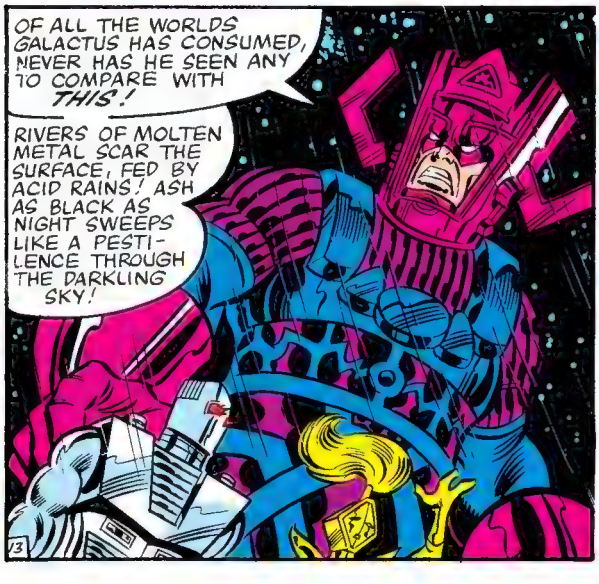
--WHEN MY WIFE TOLD ME THAT OUR KIDS WEREN'T OUR KIDS, AND WHEN OTHER CLAIRTONERS STARTED ACTING LIKE THEY WERE POSSESSED! ANY REAL SUPER HERO WOULD HAVE TUMBLED ONTO THE TRUTH!
BROCK, YOU CAN'T BLAME YOURSELF! WH-WHERE ARE YOU GOING?
9


WHERE, LORRY HONEY? UP! DOWN! ALL AROUND THE TOWN! THERE'S GOTTA BE SOME LIMIT TO THIS NOTHINGNESS WE'VE BEEN IMPRISONED IN--AND, IF I THRUST FAR ENOUGH IN EVERY DIRECTION, MAYBE I'LL FIND IT!
THE THUNDER OF JET BACKWASH ACCOMPANIES THE TORPEDO'S ATTEMPTS TO HURL HIMSELF AGAINST THE UNSEEN EXTREMITIES OF THE BORDERLESS PRISON.
NO MATTER HOW HIGH --HOW FAR-- HOW FAST I GO, I STILL COME UP AGAINST... NOTHING!
IT'S THE PERFECT PRISON! FOR ALL MY JET POWER, I CAN'T STRIKE OUT AGAINST SOMETHING THAT ISN'T THERE!
BUT THE WALLS ARE REAL, TORP! I BUSTED OUT OF A CELL LIKE THIS ONCE!*
ONLY BECAUSE SOMEONE ELSE ENGAGED YOUR WRAITH GUARDS BEFORE THEY COULD SEAL THE CELL BEHIND THEM, STEVE!
*ROM #15--AL.
BUT WE HAVEN'T SEEN ANY WRAITHS SINCE THEY STUCK US IN HERE! FOOD MATERIALIZES AS IF OUT OF NOWHERE! WHEN IT STOPS, WE'LL KNOW WE'VE OUTLIVED OUR USEFULNESS, AND THE WRAITHS HAVE DECIDED TO LET US DIE!
PLEASE, BROCK --YOU'RE FRIGHTENING THE CHILDREN!
WE'RE NOT SCARED, MOMMY!
DADDY'LL GET US OUT OF HERE! WE KNOW HE WILL!
NO ONE ANSWERS THE CHILDREN... OR NOTICES THE FAINTEST RIPPLE IN THE FLOOR OF THE WHITE CELL.
LIGHT YEARS DISTANT, A STARSHIP EMERGES FROM HYPERDRIVE TO FIND ITSELF ON THE OUTERMOST FRONTIER OF A STAR SYSTEM DOMINATED BY A HUGE, OBSCENE, EBON-BLACK SUN.
THE COLD HERE IS DEEPER THAN THE COLDEST COLD OF ANY OTHER PART OF SPACE. THE BLACK SUN SHEDS NO WARMTH UPON ITS SINGLE ORBITING WORLD.
THERE IS A SENSE OF EVIL IN THE DARKNESS THAT EMANATES FROM THE STELLAR BODY--A SENSE OF SORCERY MOST VILE, OF DARK MAGICS MOST FOUL.
THIS IS THE DARK NEBULA. 'TWAS HERE THAT THE DIRE WRAITHS--SHAPE-SHIFTING SCOURGES OF SPACE--WERE BIRTHED!
10

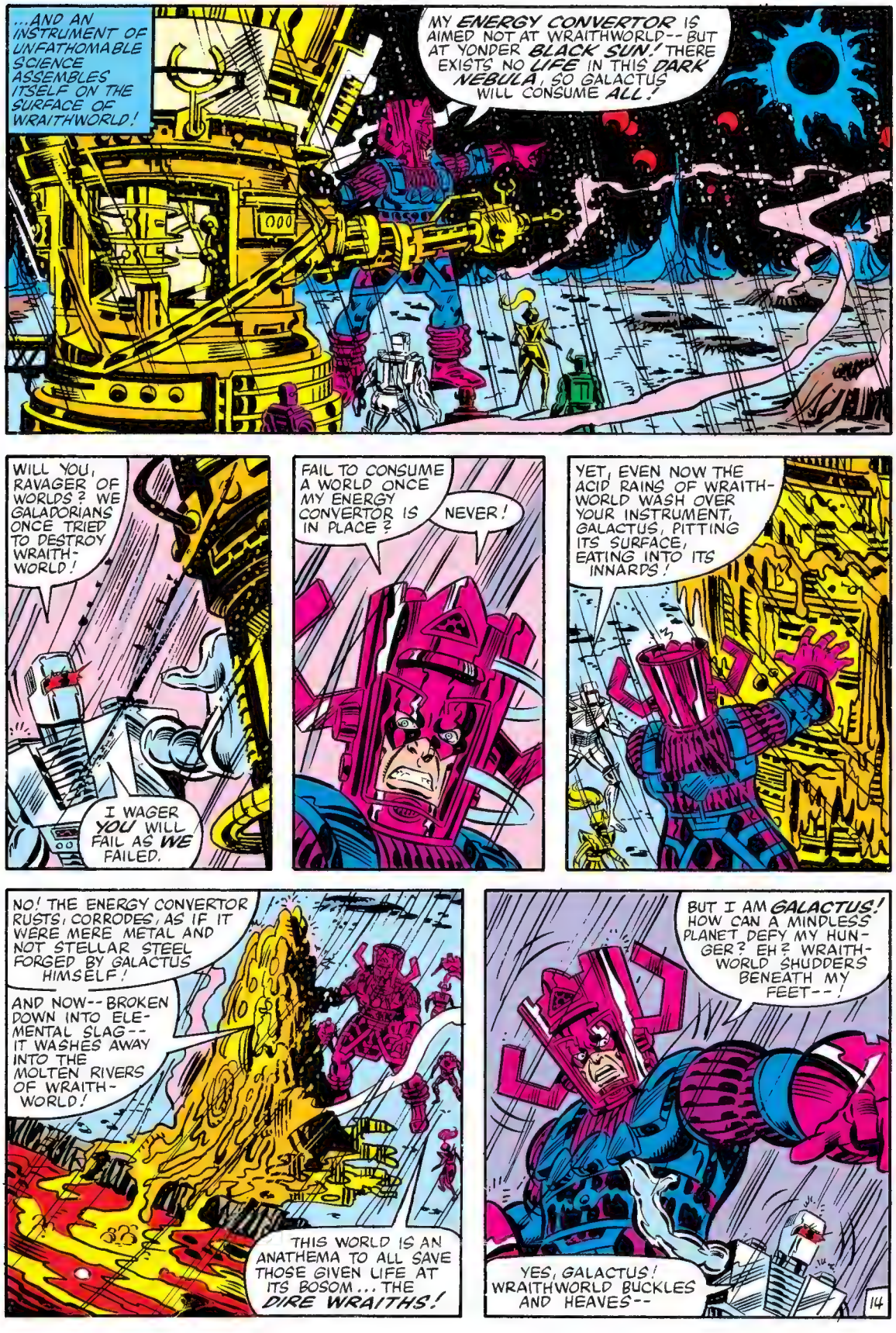

ROM HAS KEPT TO HIS PART OF OUR PACT!
AN ENTIRE STAR SYSTEM STRETCHES BEFORE ME--A WORLD AND A SUN THAT ARE GALACTUS'S FOR THE TAKING!
HAD YOU LED ME HERE INSTEAD OF TO GALADOR, TERRAX, YOU MIGHT HAVE SPARED YOURSELF BEING HUMBLED BY THE SPACEKNIGHTS!
I LED YOU TO A LIVING WORLD, GALACTUS, BURSTING WITH THE LIFE-ENERGIES WHICH SATIATE YOUR HUNGER; WHICH SLAKE YOUR THIRST!
ALL I SENSE FROM THIS DARK NEBULA BEFORE US IS DANGER--DANGER AND DEATH!
DOES THE GREAT GALACTUS CRINGE FROM DANGER? CAN THE MIGHTY GALACTUS HAVE AUGHT TO FEAR OF DEATH?
I HAVE LED YOU TO A STAR SYSTEM UPON WHICH YOU CAN FEAST UNIMPEDED, RAVAGER OF WORLDS! I HAVE FULFILLED MY PART OF OUR BARGAIN!
WILL YOU NOW CONSUME THE DARK NEBULA--OR WILL GALACTUS GO BACK ON HIS WORD?
MY VOWS ARE NOT SO LIGHTLY GIVEN THAT I NEED TO BE REMINDED OF THEM, ROM OF GALADOR!
THIS STAR SYSTEM WILL INDEED ASSUAGE THE AWESOME HUNGER OF GALACTUS --ONCE MY HERALD HAS PREPARED THE WAY FOR MY COMING!
TELEPORTED OUT INTO AIRLESS SPACE BY GALACTUS, TERRAX STANDS ASTRIDE AN ASTEROID AT THE PERIMETER OF THE DARK NEBULA.
GALACTUS MOCKS ME! ROM HAS ALREADY LED HIM HITHER!
HE JUST WISHES TERRAX THE TAMER TO SUFFER THE HUMILIATION OF CLAIMING FOR GALACTUS--
--A WORLD ALREADY TAMED BY THE SPACE-KNIGHTS TWO CENTURIES AGO!

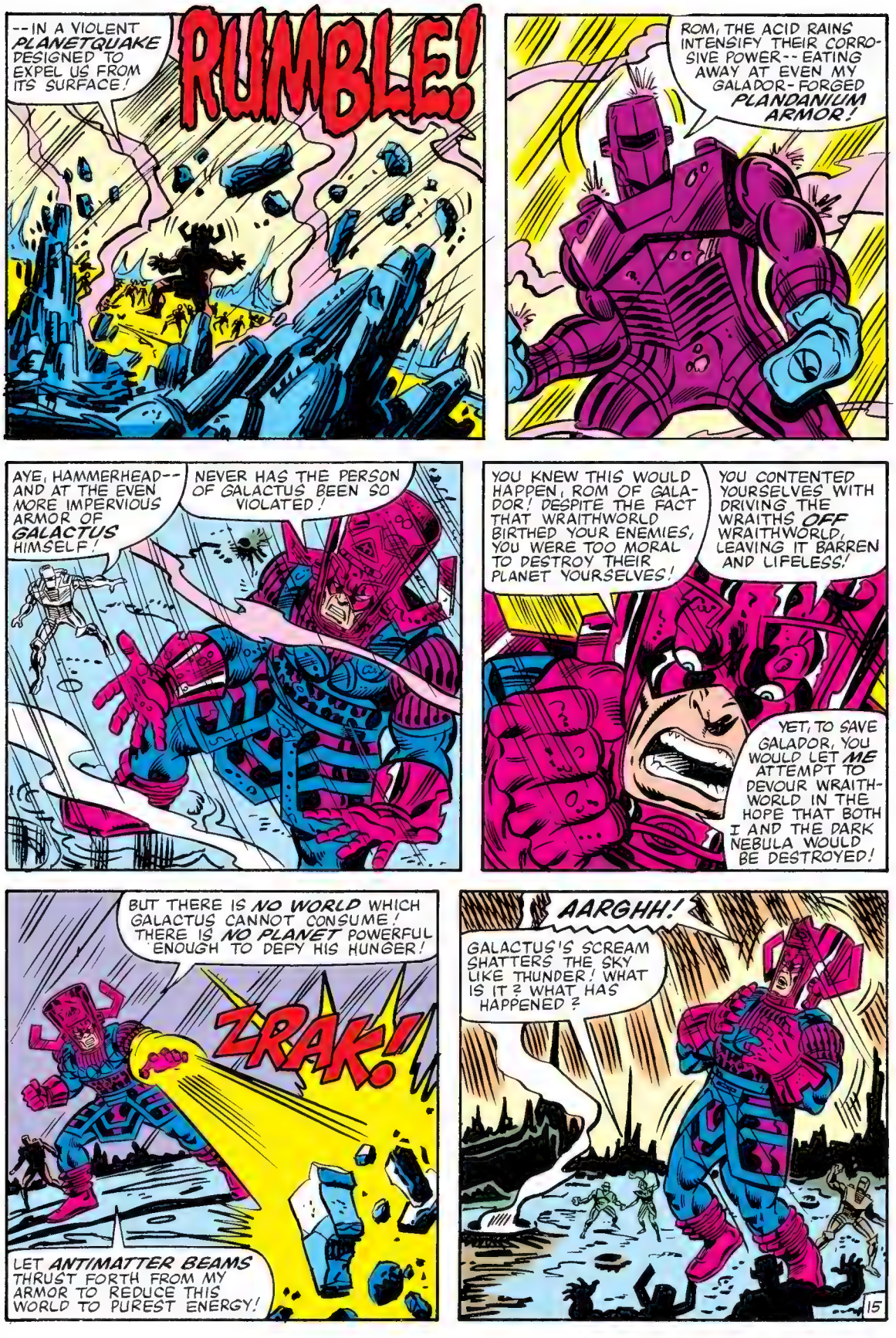
MEANWHILE, ON THE BRIDGE OF GALACTUS'S STARSHIP...
I HAD FORGOTTEN HOW HORRIBLE--HOW INSIDIOUSLY EVIL--HOW ANTI-HUMAN THE DARK NEBULA IS, ROM!
I HAVE NOT, 'TWAS HERE THAT WE FOUGHT A PITCHED BATTLE AGAINST WRAITHKIND AND WRAITH SORCERY, AND SUCCEEDED IN DRIVING THE SHAPE-SHIFTERS INTO SPACE.
YET WE DID NOT TARRY TO SAVOR OUR VICTORY, FEARING HIDDEN HORRORS WITHIN THE DARK NEBULA!
AS IF TO UNDERSCORE ROM'S DIRE PRONOUNCEMENT, A TERRIFIED TERRAX REAPPEARS COWERING BEFORE HIS MASTER.
DEATH! DEATH AND DARKNESS! ENTER NOT THE DARK NEBULA, GALACTUS--
--LEST EVEN YOU SHOULD FAIL TO RETURN!
A HERALD OF GALACTUS QUAKING IN TERROR--?! WHAT KIND OF WORLD HAVE YOU LED GALACTUS TO, SPACEKNIGHT?
A WORLD--A STAR SYSTEM--UNLIKE ANY OTHER, GALACTUS! DEVOUR THE DARK NEBULA... IF YOU CAN!
I WHO HAVE SHRUGGED OFF ARMORED ARMADAS, WHO HAVE LAUGHED IN THE FACE OF LIVING PLANETS, CAN STOMACH ANY WORLD, SPACEKNIGHT!
GALACTUS WILL NOW REMOVE HIMSELF TO THIS DARK NEBULA--
--TO SEE FIRST HAND WHAT HORRORS COULD HUMBLE GALACTUS'S HERALD!
YOU SPACEKNIGHTS SHALL ACCOMPANY ME THITHER...
...TO SIT AS UNWILLING GUESTS AT THE FEAST OF GALACTUS!
12

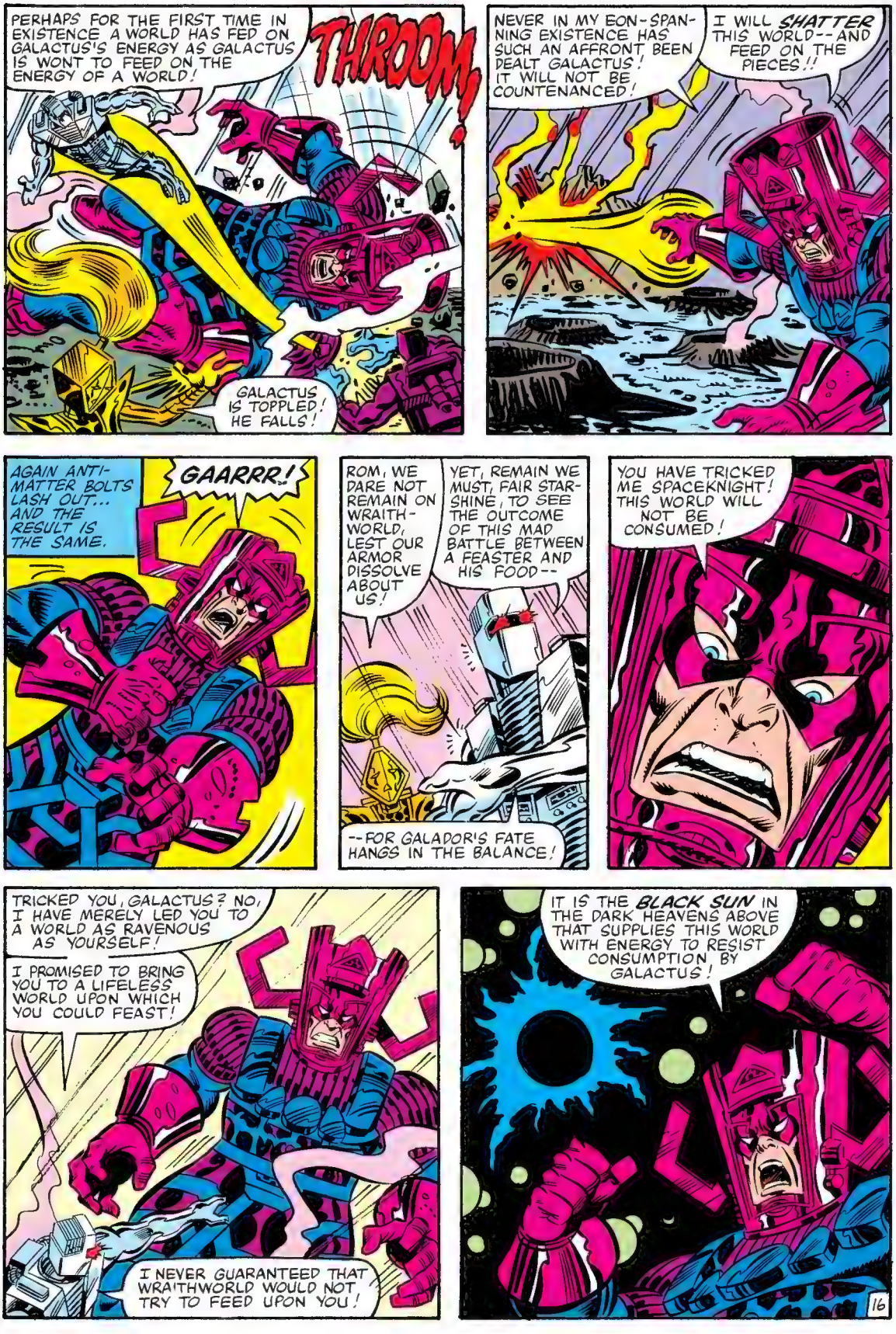

WRAITHWORLD!
IF EVER IT POSSESSED ANY OTHER NAME, NO LIVING SOUL OUTSIDE THE DARK NEBULA EVER KNEW IT!
WRAITHWORLD!
ONCE IT HAD CITIES -- JET-BLACK TOWERS CLAWING AT A STARLESS SKY! VENGEFUL SPACEKNIGHTS TOPPLED THEM, DRIVING THE SHAPE-SHIFTING POPULACE TO WAITING SHIPS!
WRAITHWORLD!
BELOW ITS SURFACE MIGHTY ENGINES OF WAR WERE BUILT! ACROSS ITS SURFACE SLAVES OF MYRIAD WORLDS LABORED AND DIED! ABOVE ITS SURFACE OBSCENE EBONY CREATURES STRETCHED THEIR LEATHERN WINGS AND SHRIEKED DOWN THE HEAVENS!
WRAITHWORLD!

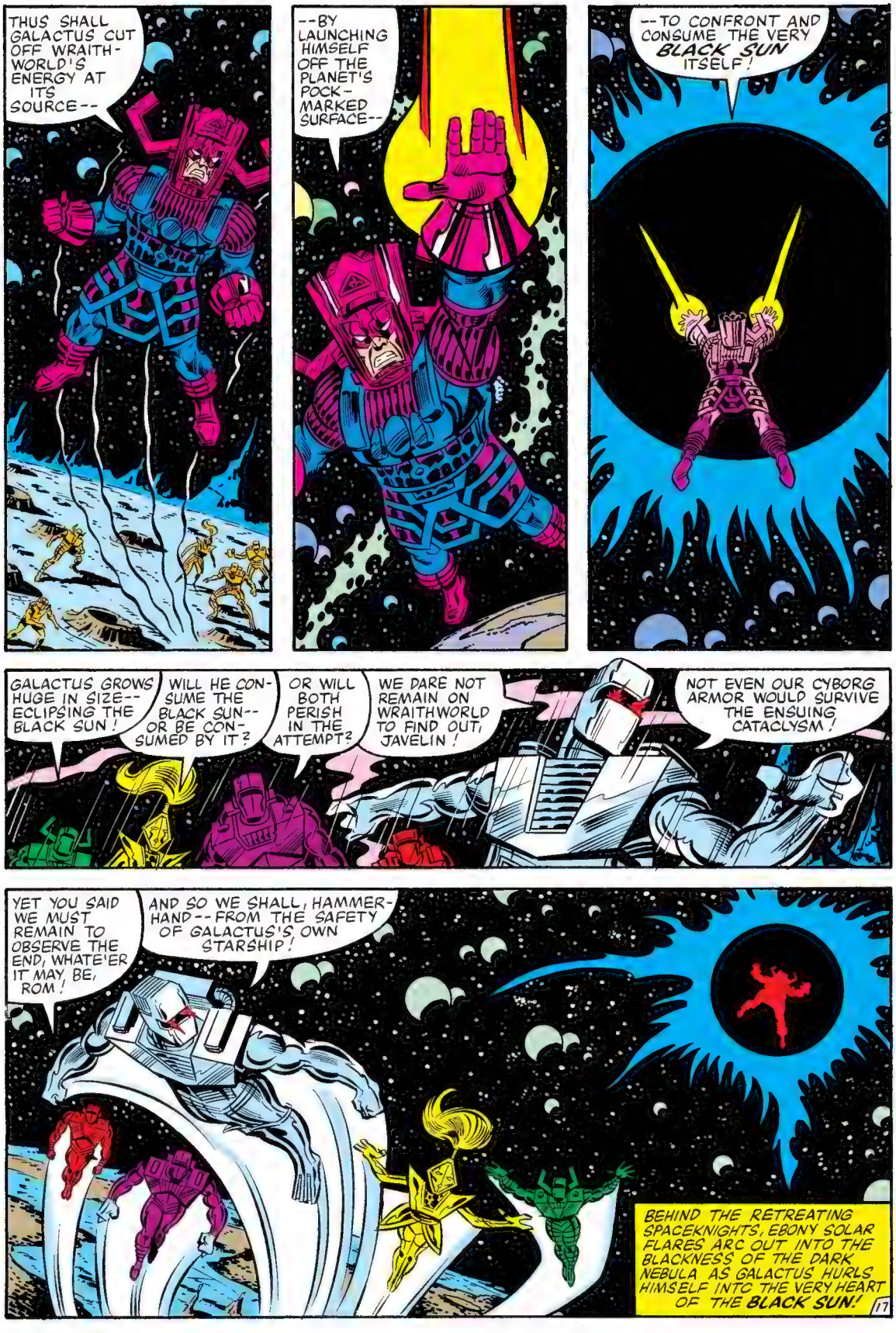

OF ALL THE WORLDS GALACTUS HAS CONSUMED, NEVER HAS HE SEEN ANY TO COMPARE WITH THIS!
RIVERS OF MOLTEN METAL SCAR THE SURFACE, FED BY ACID RAINS! ASH AS BLACK AS NIGHT SWEEPS LIKE A PESTILENCE THROUGH THE DARKLING SKY!
13

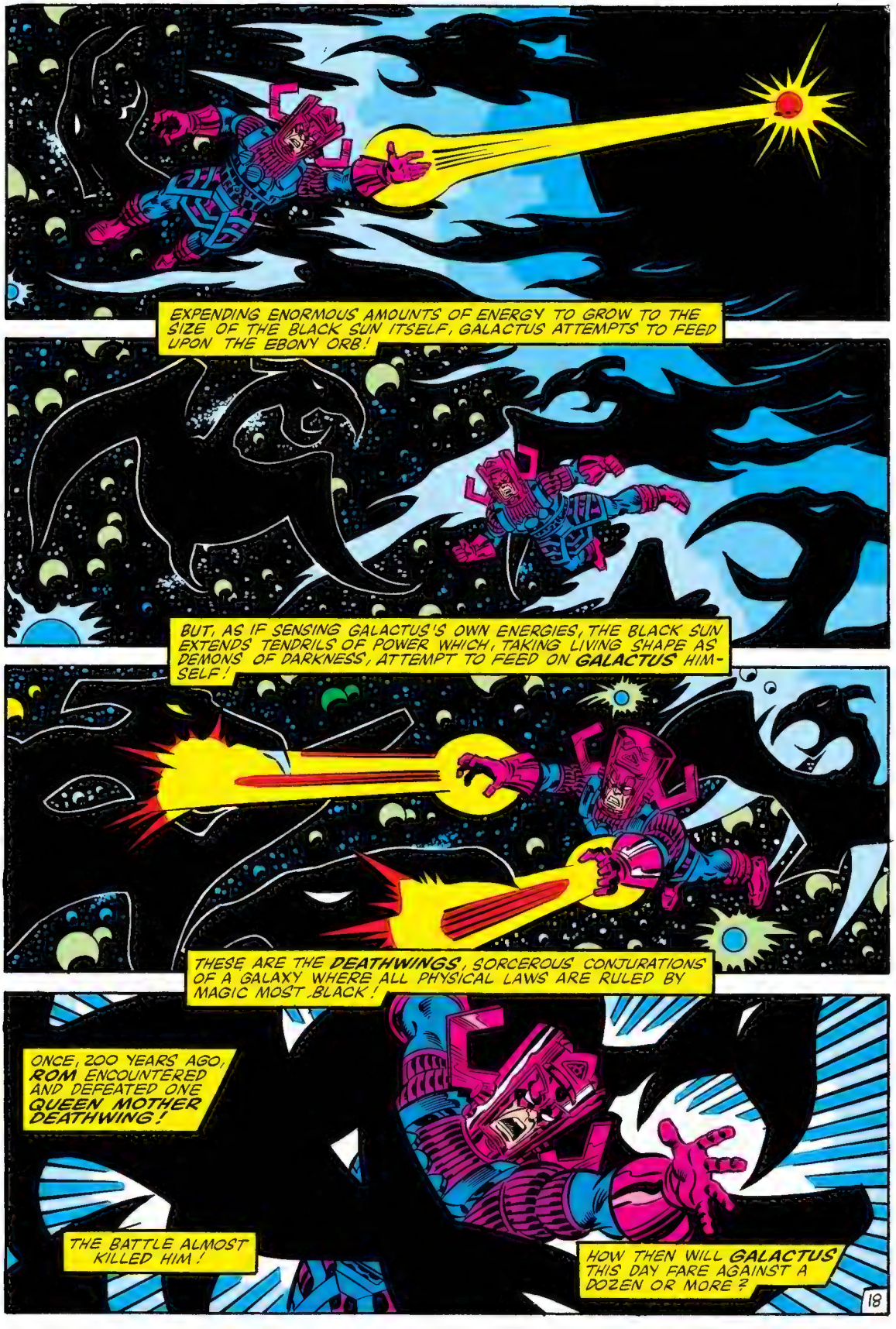
STILL, A WORLD IS A WORLD, AND THE HUNGER OF GALACTUS MUST BE FED!
A GESTURE...

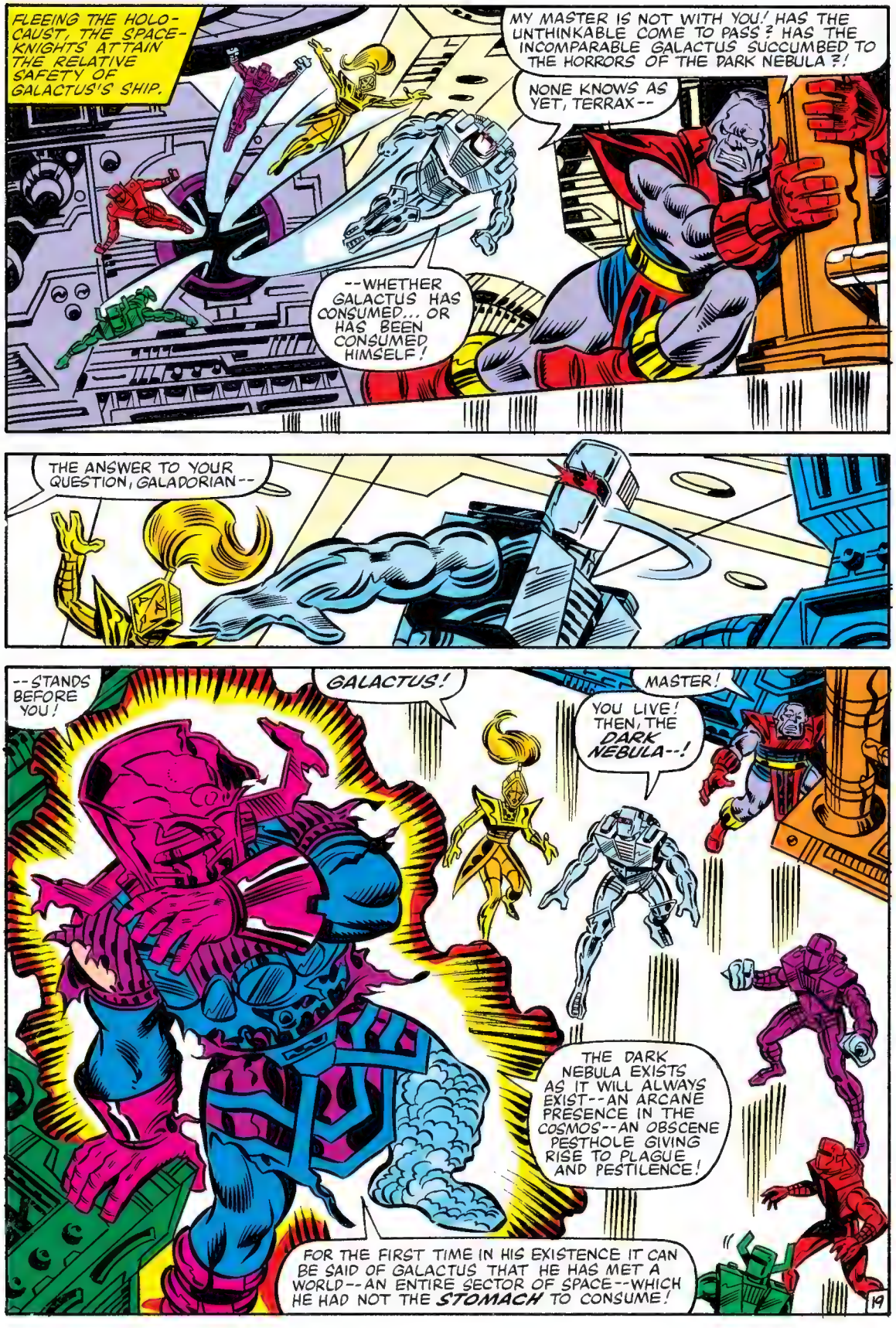

...AND AN INSTRUMENT OF UNFATHOMABLE SCIENCE ASSEMBLES ITSELF ON THE SURFACE OF WRAITHWORLD!
MY ENERGY CONVERTOR IS AIMED NOT AT WRAITHWORLD--BUT AT YONDER BLACK SUN! THERE EXISTS NO LIFE IN THIS DARK NEBULA, SO GALACTUS WILL CONSUME ALL!
WILL YOU, RAVAGER OF WORLDS? WE GALADORIANS ONCE TRIED TO DESTROY WRAITH-WORLD!
I WAGER YOU WILL FAIL AS WE FAILED.
FAIL TO CONSUME A WORLD ONCE MY ENERGY CONVERTOR IS IN PLACE?
NEVER!
YET, EVEN NOW THE ACID RAINS OF WRAITH-WORLD WASH OVER YOUR INSTRUMENT, GALACTUS, PITTING ITS SURFACE, EATING INTO ITS INNARDS!
NO! THE ENERGY CONVERTOR RUSTS, CORRODES, AS IF IT WERE MERE METAL AND NOT STELLAR STEEL FORGED BY GALACTUS HIMSELF!
AND NOW--BROKEN DOWN INTO ELEMENTAL SLAG--IT WASHES AWAY INTO THE MOLTEN RIVERS OF WRAITH-WORLD!
THIS WORLD IS AN ANATHEMA TO ALL SAVE THOSE GIVEN LIFE AT ITS BOSOM... THE DIRE WRAITHS!
BUT I AM GALACTUS! HOW CAN A MINDLESS PLANET DEFY MY HUNGER? EH? WRAITH-WORLD SHUDDERS BENEATH MY FEET--!
YES, GALACTUS! WRAITHWORLD BUCKLES AND HEAVES--
14

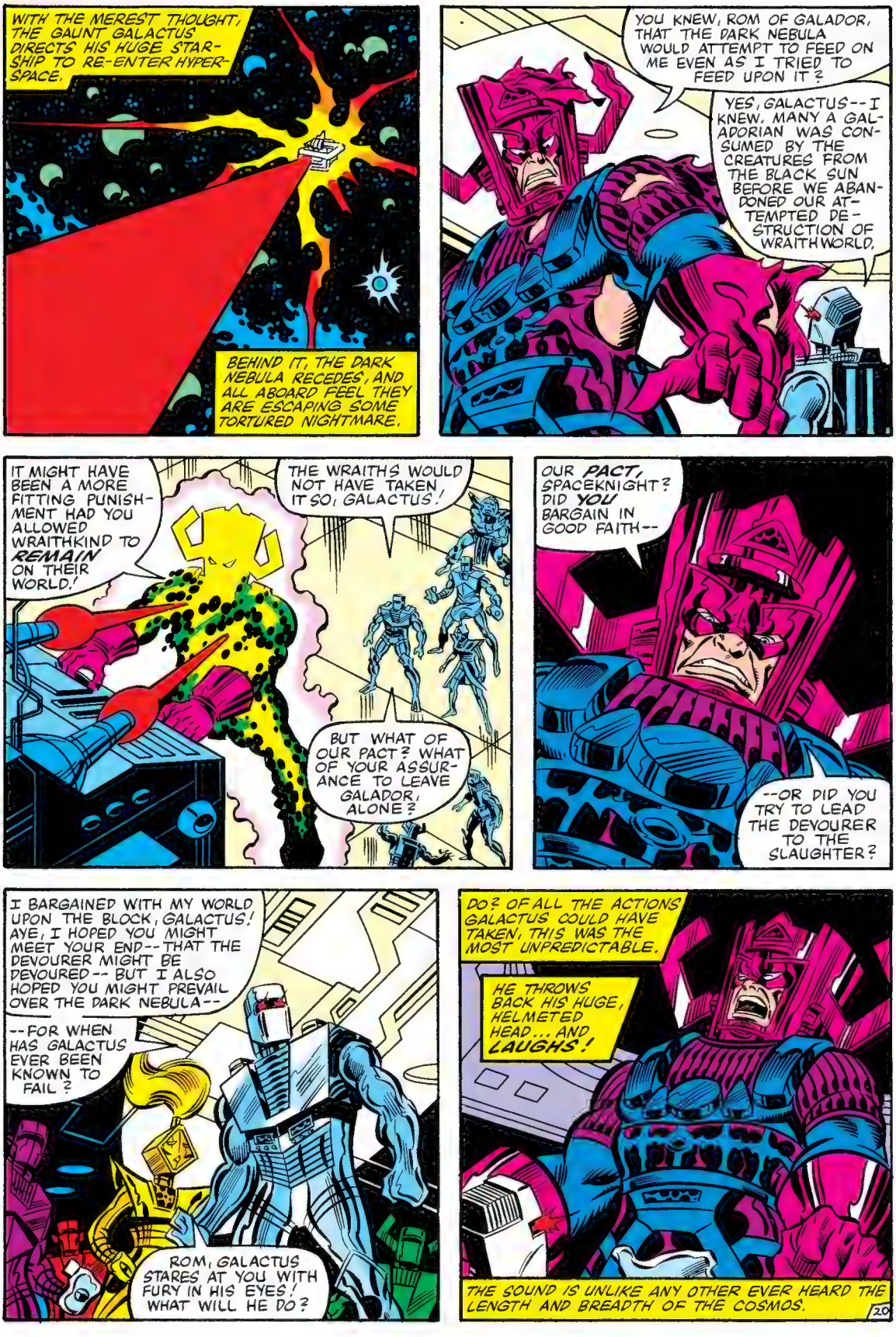

--IN A VIOLENT PLANETQUAKE DESIGNED TO EXPEL US FROM ITS SURFACE!
RUMBLE!
ROM, THE ACID RAINS INTENSIFY THEIR CORROSIVE POWER-- EATING AWAY AT EVEN MY GALADOR-FORGED PLANDANIUM ARMOR!
AYE, HAMMERHEAD-- AND AT THE EVEN MORE IMPERVIOUS ARMOR OF GALACTUS HIMSELF!
NEVER HAS THE PERSON OF GALACTUS BEEN SO VIOLATED!
YOU KNEW THIS WOULD HAPPEN, ROM OF GALADOR! DESPITE THE FACT THAT WRAITHWORLD BIRTHED YOUR ENEMIES, YOU WERE TOO MORAL TO DESTROY THEIR PLANET YOURSELVES!
YOU CONTENTED YOURSELVES WITH DRIVING THE WRAITHS OFF WRAITHWORLD, LEAVING IT BARREN AND LIFELESS!
YET, TO SAVE GALADOR, YOU WOULD LET ME ATTEMPT TO DEVOUR WRAITHWORLD IN THE HOPE THAT BOTH I AND THE DARK NEBULA WOULD BE DESTROYED!
BUT THERE IS NO WORLD WHICH GALACTUS CANNOT CONSUME! THERE IS NO PLANET POWERFUL ENOUGH TO DEFY HIS HUNGER!
ZRAK!
LET ANTIMATTER BEAMS THRUST FORTH FROM MY ARMOR TO REDUCE THIS WORLD TO PUREST ENERGY!
AARGHH!
GALACTUS'S SCREAM SHATTERS THE SKY LIKE THUNDER! WHAT IS IT? WHAT HAS HAPPENED?
15

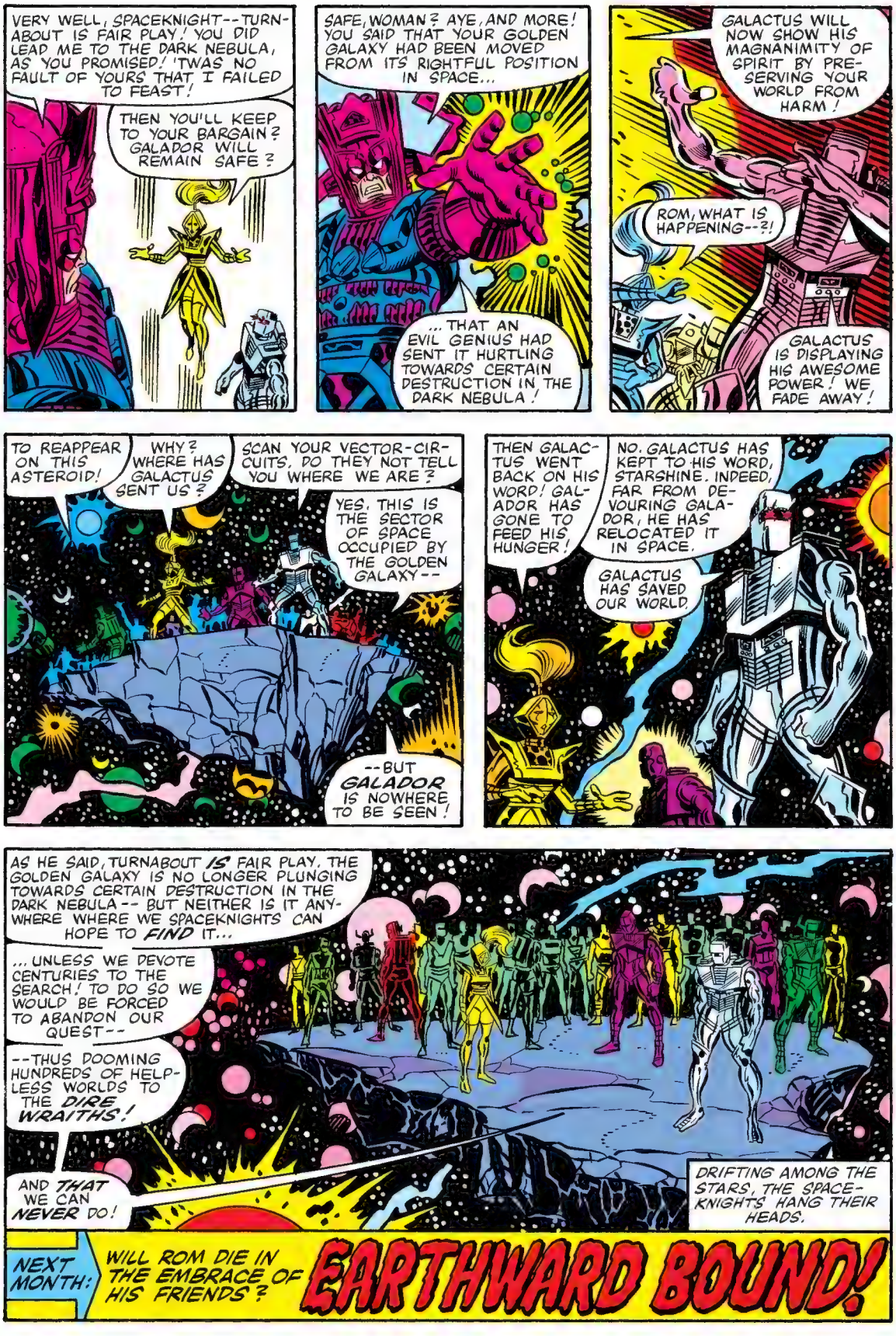

PERHAPS FOR THE FIRST TIME IN EXISTENCE A WORLD HAS FED ON GALACTUS'S ENERGY AS GALACTUS IS WONT TO FEED ON THE ENERGY OF A WORLD!
THROOM!
GALACTUS IS TOPPLED! HE FALLS!
NEVER IN MY EON-SPANNING EXISTENCE HAS SUCH AN AFFRONT BEEN DEALT GALACTUS! IT WILL NOT BE COUNTENANCED!
I WILL SHATTER THIS WORLD--AND FEED ON THE PIECES!!
AGAIN ANTI-MATTER BOLTS LASH OUT... AND THE RESULT IS THE SAME.
GAARRR!
ROM, WE DARE NOT REMAIN ON WRAITH-WORLD, LEST OUR ARMOR DISSOLVE ABOUT US!
YET, REMAIN WE MUST, FAIR STARSHINE, TO SEE THE OUTCOME OF THIS MAD BATTLE BETWEEN A FEASTER AND HIS FOOD--
--FOR GALADOR'S FATE HANGS IN THE BALANCE!
YOU HAVE TRICKED ME SPACEKNIGHT! THIS WORLD WILL NOT BE CONSUMED!
TRICKED YOU, GALACTUS? NO, I HAVE MERELY LED YOU TO A WORLD AS RAVENOUS AS YOURSELF!
I PROMISED TO BRING YOU TO A LIFELESS WORLD UPON WHICH YOU COULD FEAST!
I NEVER GUARANTEED THAT WRAITHWORLD WOULD NOT TRY TO FEED UPON YOU!
IT IS THE BLACK SUN IN THE DARK HEAVENS ABOVE THAT SUPPLIES THIS WORLD WITH ENERGY TO RESIST CONSUMPTION BY GALACTUS!
16


THUS SHALL GALACTUS CUT OFF WRAITH-WORLD'S ENERGY AT ITS SOURCE--
--BY LAUNCHING HIMSELF OFF THE PLANET'S POCK-MARKED SURFACE--
--TO CONFRONT AND CONSUME THE VERY BLACK SUN ITSELF!
GALACTUS GROWS HUGE IN SIZE--ECLIPSING THE BLACK SUN!
WILL HE CONSUME THE BLACK SUN--OR BE CONSUMED BY IT?
OR WILL BOTH PERISH IN THE ATTEMPT?
WE DARE NOT REMAIN ON WRAITHWORLD TO FIND OUT, JAVELIN!
NOT EVEN OUR CYBORG ARMOR WOULD SURVIVE THE ENSUING CATACLYSM!
YET YOU SAID WE MUST REMAIN TO OBSERVE THE END, WHATE'ER IT MAY BE, ROM!
AND SO WE SHALL, HAMMER-HAND--FROM THE SAFETY OF GALACTUS'S OWN STARSHIP!
BEHIND THE RETREATING SPACEKNIGHTS, EBONY SOLAR FLARES ARC OUT INTO THE BLACKNESS OF THE DARK NEBULA AS GALACTUS HURLS HIMSELF INTO THE VERY HEART OF THE BLACK SUN!
17


EXPENDING ENORMOUS AMOUNTS OF ENERGY TO GROW TO THE SIZE OF THE BLACK SUN ITSELF, GALACTUS ATTEMPTS TO FEED UPON THE EBONY ORB!
BUT, AS IF SENSING GALACTUS'S OWN ENERGIES, THE BLACK SUN EXTENDS TENDRILS OF POWER WHICH, TAKING LIVING SHAPE AS DEMONS OF DARKNESS, ATTEMPT TO FEED ON GALACTUS HIMSELF!
THESE ARE THE DEATHWINGS, SORCEROUS CONJURATIONS OF A GALAXY WHERE ALL PHYSICAL LAWS ARE RULED BY MAGIC MOST BLACK!
ONCE, 200 YEARS AGO, ROM ENCOUNTERED AND DEFEATED ONE QUEEN MOTHER DEATHWING!
THE BATTLE ALMOST KILLED HIM!
HOW THEN WILL GALACTUS THIS DAY FARE AGAINST A DOZEN OR MORE?
18


FLEEING THE HOLOCAUST, THE SPACE-KNIGHTS ATTAIN THE RELATIVE SAFETY OF GALACTUS'S SHIP.
MY MASTER IS NOT WITH YOU! HAS THE UNTHINKABLE COME TO PASS? HAS THE INCOMPARABLE GALACTUS SUCCUMBED TO THE HORRORS OF THE DARK NEBULA?!
NONE KNOWS AS YET, TERRAX--
--WHETHER GALACTUS HAS CONSUMED... OR HAS BEEN CONSUMED HIMSELF!
THE ANSWER TO YOUR QUESTION, GALADORIAN--
--STANDS BEFORE YOU!
GALACTUS!
MASTER!
YOU LIVE! THEN, THE DARK NEBULA--!
THE DARK NEBULA EXISTS AS IT WILL ALWAYS EXIST--AN ARCANE PRESENCE IN THE COSMOS--AN OBSCENE PESTHOLE GIVING RISE TO PLAGUE AND PESTILENCE!
FOR THE FIRST TIME IN HIS EXISTENCE IT CAN BE SAID OF GALACTUS THAT HE HAS MET A WORLD--AN ENTIRE SECTOR OF SPACE--WHICH HE HAD NOT THE STOMACH TO CONSUME!
19


WITH THE MEREST THOUGHT, THE GAUNT GALACTUS DIRECTS HIS HUGE STAR-SHIP TO RE-ENTER HYPER-SPACE.
BEHIND IT, THE DARK NEBULA RECEDES, AND ALL ABOARD FEEL THEY ARE ESCAPING SOME TORTURED NIGHTMARE.
YOU KNEW, ROM OF GALADOR, THAT THE DARK NEBULA WOULD ATTEMPT TO FEED ON ME EVEN AS I TRIED TO FEED UPON IT?
YES, GALACTUS--I KNEW. MANY A GALADORIAN WAS CONSUMED BY THE CREATURES FROM THE BLACK SUN BEFORE WE ABANDONED OUR ATTEMPTED DESTRUCTION OF WRAITH WORLD.
IT MIGHT HAVE BEEN A MORE FITTING PUNISHMENT HAD YOU ALLOWED WRAITHKIND TO REMAIN ON THEIR WORLD!
THE WRAITHS WOULD NOT HAVE TAKEN IT SO, GALACTUS!
BUT WHAT OF OUR PACT? WHAT OF YOUR ASSURANCE TO LEAVE GALADOR, ALONE?
OUR PACT, SPACEKNIGHT? DID YOU BARGAIN IN GOOD FAITH--
--OR DID YOU TRY TO LEAD THE DEVOURER TO THE SLAUGHTER?
I BARGAINED WITH MY WORLD UPON THE BLOCK, GALACTUS! AYE, I HOPED YOU MIGHT MEET YOUR END--THAT THE DEVOURER MIGHT BE DEVOURED--BUT I ALSO HOPED YOU MIGHT PREVAIL OVER THE DARK NEBULA--
--FOR WHEN HAS GALACTUS EVER BEEN KNOWN TO FAIL?
ROM, GALACTUS STARES AT YOU WITH FURY IN HIS EYES! WHAT WILL HE DO?
DO? OF ALL THE ACTIONS GALACTUS COULD HAVE TAKEN, THIS WAS THE MOST UNPREDICTABLE.
HE THROWS BACK HIS HUGE, HELMETED HEAD... AND LAUGHS!
THE SOUND IS UNLIKE ANY OTHER EVER HEARD THE LENGTH AND BREADTH OF THE COSMOS.
20


VERY WELL, SPACEKNIGHT--TURNABOUT IS FAIR PLAY! YOU DID LEAD ME TO THE DARK NEBULA, AS YOU PROMISED! 'TWAS NO FAULT OF YOURS THAT I FAILED TO FEAST!
THEN YOU'LL KEEP TO YOUR BARGAIN? GALADOR WILL REMAIN SAFE?
SAFE, WOMAN? AYE, AND MORE! YOU SAID THAT YOUR GOLDEN GALAXY HAD BEEN MOVED FROM ITS RIGHTFUL POSITION IN SPACE...
... THAT AN EVIL GENIUS HAD SENT IT HURTLING TOWARDS CERTAIN DESTRUCTION IN THE DARK NEBULA!
GALACTUS WILL NOW SHOW HIS MAGNANIMITY OF SPIRIT BY PRESERVING YOUR WORLD FROM HARM!
ROM, WHAT IS HAPPENING--?!
GALACTUS IS DISPLAYING HIS AWESOME POWER! WE FADE AWAY!
TO REAPPEAR ON THIS ASTEROID!
WHY? WHERE HAS GALACTUS SENT US?
SCAN YOUR VECTOR-CIRCUITS, DO THEY NOT TELL YOU WHERE WE ARE?
YES, THIS IS THE SECTOR OF SPACE OCCUPIED BY THE GOLDEN GALAXY--
--BUT GALADOR IS NOWHERE TO BE SEEN!
THEN GALACTUS WENT BACK ON HIS WORD! GALADOR HAS GONE TO FEED HIS HUNGER!
NO. GALACTUS HAS KEPT TO HIS WORD, STARSHINE. INDEED, FAR FROM DEVOURING GALADOR, HE HAS RELOCATED IT IN SPACE.
GALACTUS HAS SAVED OUR WORLD.
AS HE SAID, TURNABOUT IS FAIR PLAY. THE GOLDEN GALAXY IS NO LONGER PLUNGING TOWARDS CERTAIN DESTRUCTION IN THE DARK NEBULA -- BUT NEITHER IS IT ANYWHERE WHERE WE SPACEKNIGHTS CAN HOPE TO FIND IT...
... UNLESS WE DEVOTE CENTURIES TO THE SEARCH! TO DO SO WE WOULD BE FORCED TO ABANDON OUR QUEST--
--THUS DOOMING HUNDREDS OF HELPLESS WORLDS TO THE DIRE WRAITHS!
AND THAT WE CAN NEVER DO!
DRIFTING AMONG THE STARS, THE SPACEKNIGHTS HANG THEIR HEADS.
NEXT MONTH: WILL ROM DIE IN THE EMBRACE OF HIS FRIENDS?
EARTHWARD BOUND!

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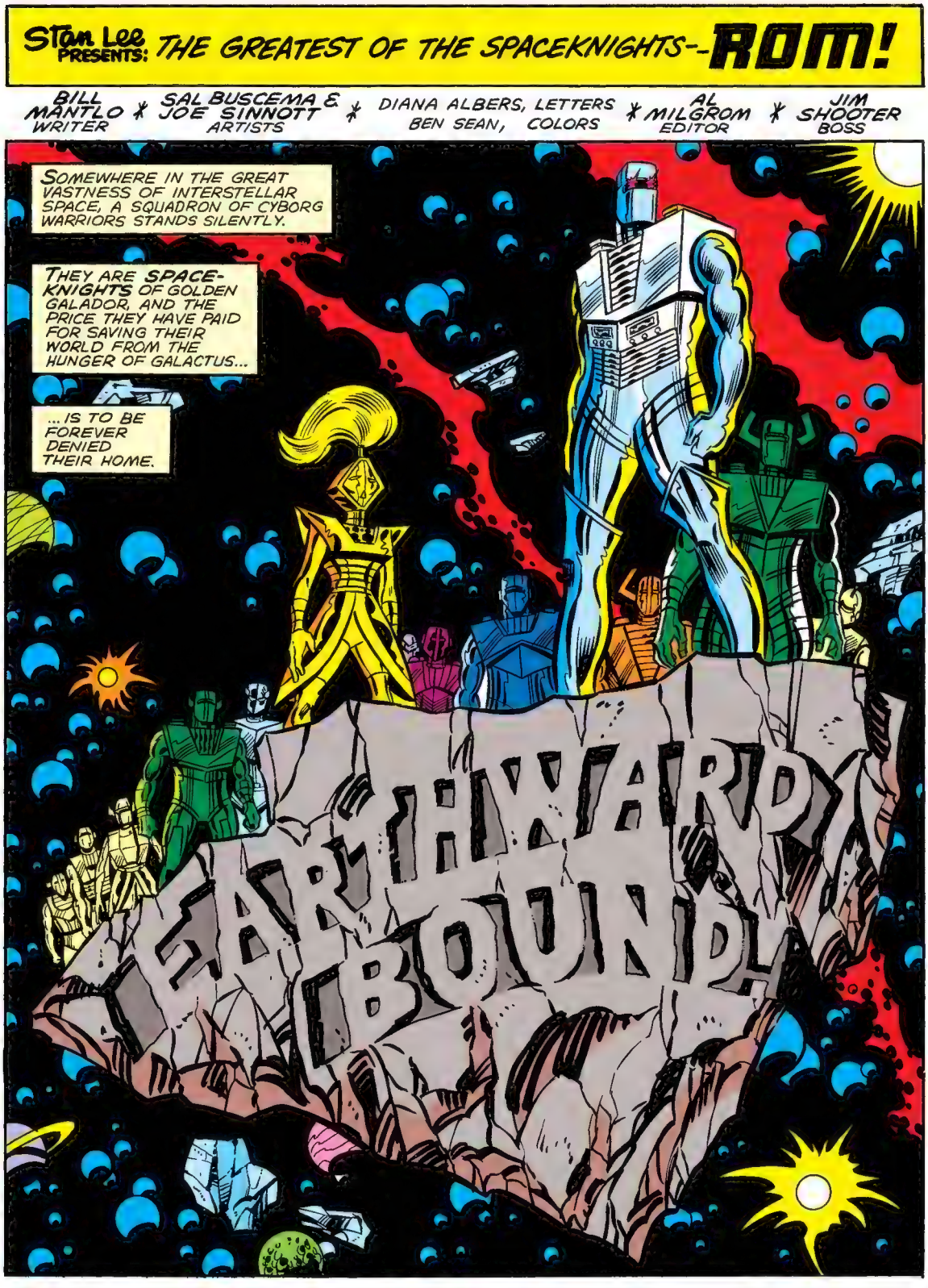
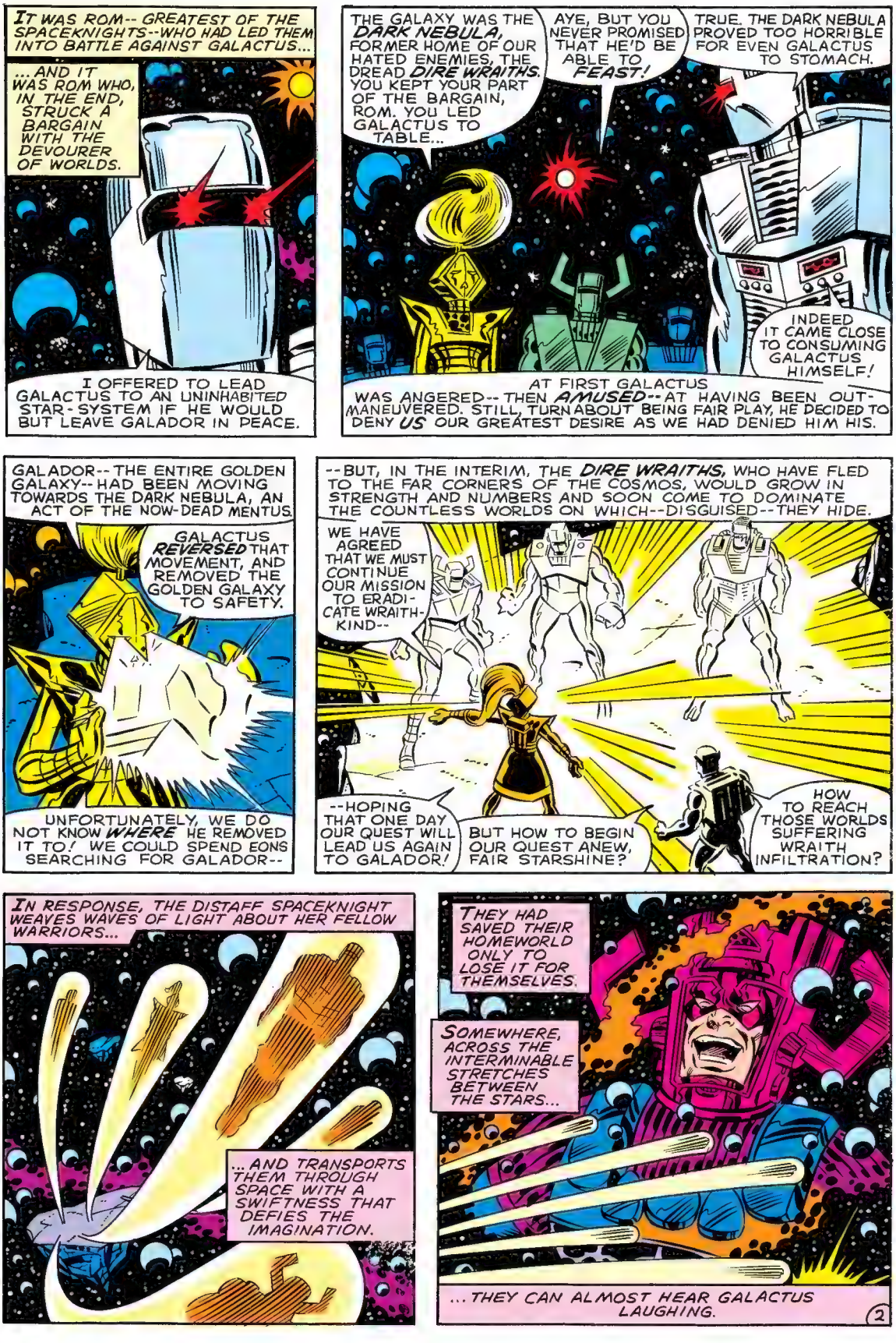
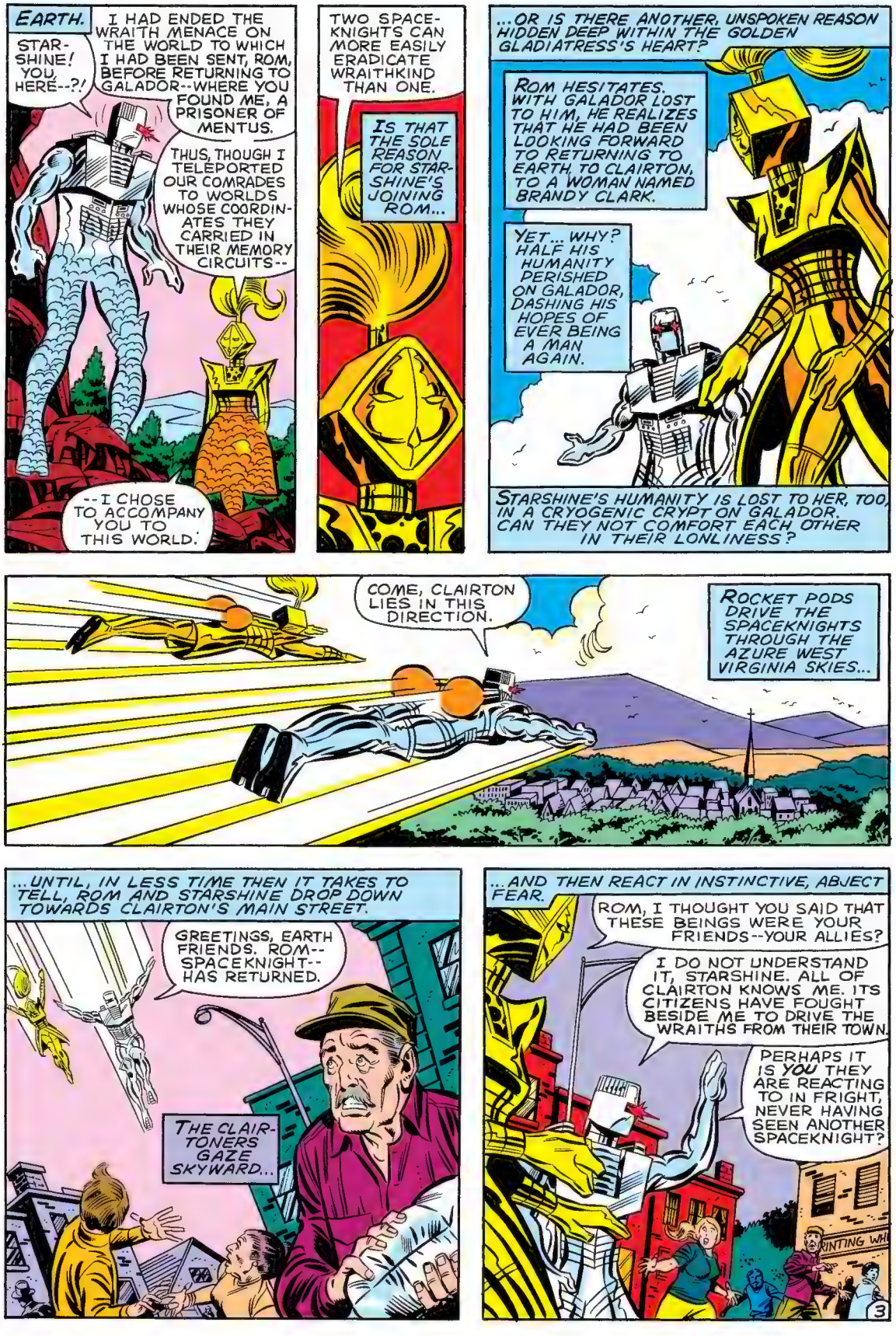
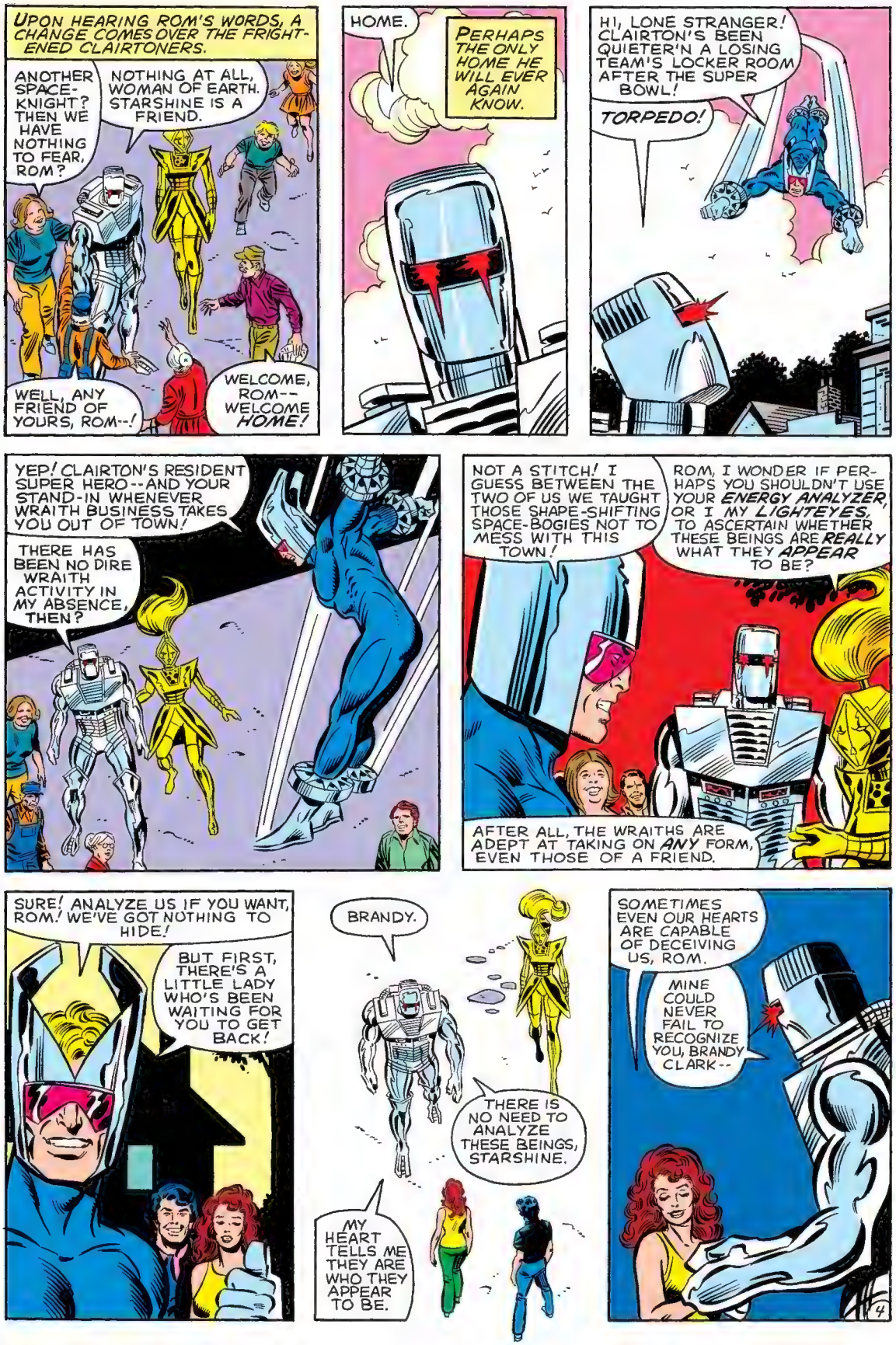
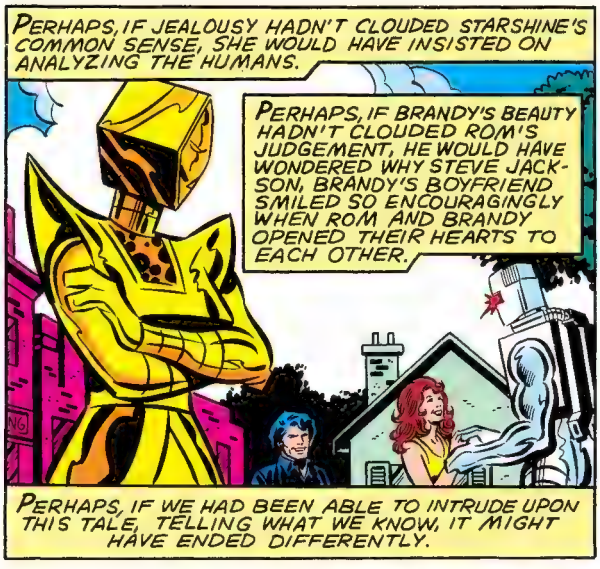
ROM™
SPACEKNIGHT
DANGER DOWN UNDER!

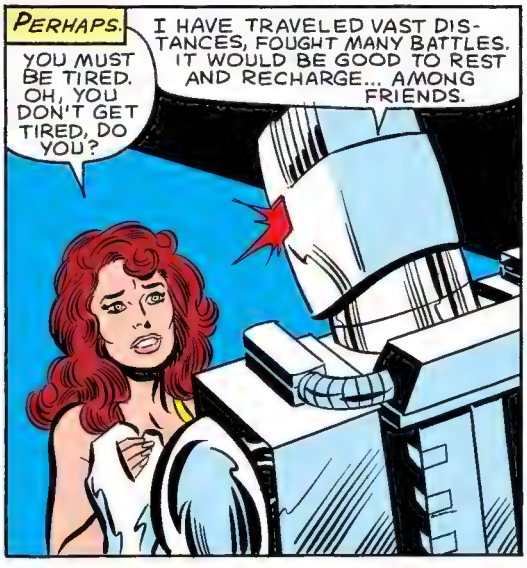

STAN LEE PRESENTS: THE GREATEST OF THE SPACEKNIGHTS--ROM!
BILL MANTLO WRITER
SAL BUSCEMA & JOE SINNOTT ARTISTS
DIANA ALBERS, LETTERS BEN SEAN, COLORS
AL MILGROM EDITOR
JIM SHOOTER BOSS
SOMEWHERE IN THE GREAT VASTNESS OF INTERSTELLAR SPACE, A SQUADRON OF CYBORG WARRIORS STANDS SILENTLY.
THEY ARE SPACE-KNIGHTS OF GOLDEN GALADOR, AND THE PRICE THEY HAVE PAID FOR SAVING THEIR WORLD FROM THE HUNGER OF GALACTUS...
...IS TO BE FOREVER DENIED THEIR HOME.
EARTHBOUND

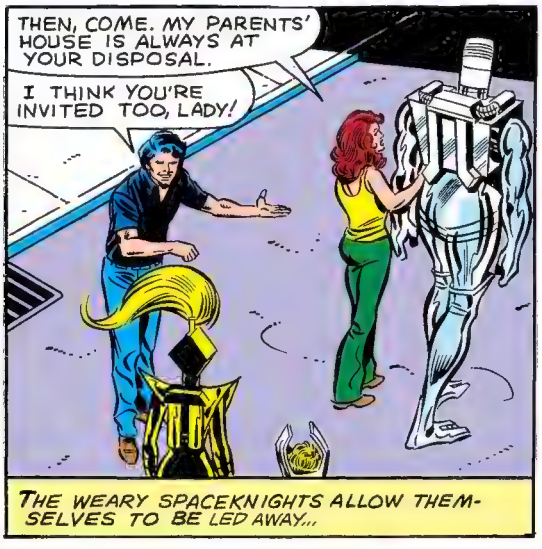

IT WAS ROM-- GREATEST OF THE SPACEKNIGHTS--WHO HAD LED THEM INTO BATTLE AGAINST GALACTUS...
...AND IT WAS ROM WHO, IN THE END, STRUCK A BARGAIN WITH THE DEVOURER OF WORLDS.
I OFFERED TO LEAD GALACTUS TO AN UNINHABITED STAR-SYSTEM IF HE WOULD BUT LEAVE GALADOR IN PEACE.
THE GALAXY WAS THE DARK NEBULA, FORMER HOME OF OUR HATED ENEMIES, THE DREAD DIRE WRAITHS. YOU KEPT YOUR PART OF THE BARGAIN, ROM. YOU LED GALACTUS TO TABLE...
AYE, BUT YOU NEVER PROMISED THAT HE'D BE ABLE TO FEAST!
TRUE. THE DARK NEBULA PROVED TOO HORRIBLE FOR EVEN GALACTUS TO STOMACH.
INDEED IT CAME CLOSE TO CONSUMING GALACTUS HIMSELF!
AT FIRST GALACTUS WAS ANGERED-- THEN AMUSED-- AT HAVING BEEN OUT-MANEUVERED. STILL, TURNABOUT BEING FAIR PLAY, HE DECIDED TO DENY US OUR GREATEST DESIRE AS WE HAD DENIED HIM HIS.
GALADOR-- THE ENTIRE GOLDEN GALAXY-- HAD BEEN MOVING TOWARDS THE DARK NEBULA, AN ACT OF THE NOW-DEAD MENTUS.
GALACTUS REVERSED THAT MOVEMENT, AND REMOVED THE GOLDEN GALAXY TO SAFETY.
UNFORTUNATELY, WE DO NOT KNOW WHERE HE REMOVED IT TO! WE COULD SPEND EONS SEARCHING FOR GALADOR--
--BUT, IN THE INTERIM, THE DIRE WRAITHS, WHO HAVE FLED TO THE FAR CORNERS OF THE COSMOS, WOULD GROW IN STRENGTH AND NUMBERS AND SOON COME TO DOMINATE THE COUNTLESS WORLDS ON WHICH--DISGUISED--THEY HIDE.
WE HAVE AGREED THAT WE MUST CONTINUE OUR MISSION TO ERADICATE WRAITH-KIND--
--HOPING THAT ONE DAY OUR QUEST WILL LEAD US AGAIN TO GALADOR!
BUT HOW TO BEGIN OUR QUEST ANEW, FAIR STARSHINE?
HOW TO REACH THOSE WORLDS SUFFERING WRAITH INFILTRATION?
IN RESPONSE, THE DISTAFF SPACEKNIGHT WEAVES WAVES OF LIGHT ABOUT HER FELLOW WARRIORS...
...AND TRANSPORTS THEM THROUGH SPACE WITH A SWIFTNESS THAT DEFIES THE IMAGINATION.
THEY HAD SAVED THEIR HOMEWORLD ONLY TO LOSE IT FOR THEMSELVES.
SOMEWHERE, ACROSS THE INTERMINABLE STRETCHES BETWEEN THE STARS...
...THEY CAN ALMOST HEAR GALACTUS LAUGHING.
2

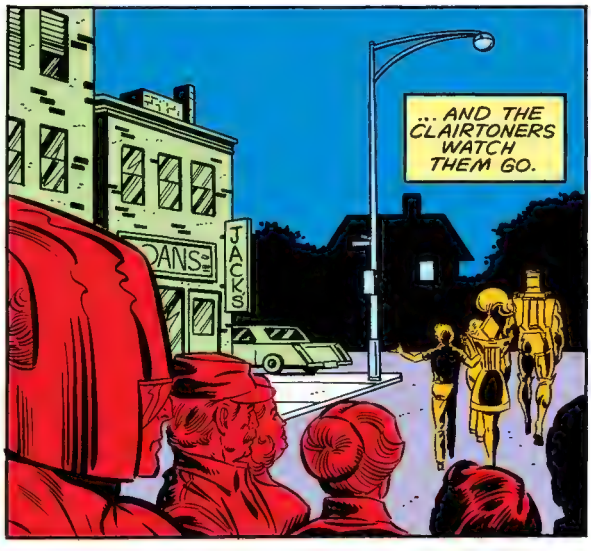

EARTH.
STAR-SHINE! YOU, HERE--?!
I HAD ENDED THE WRAITH MENACE ON THE WORLD TO WHICH I HAD BEEN SENT, ROM, BEFORE RETURNING TO GALADOR--WHERE YOU FOUND ME, A PRISONER OF MENTUS.
THUS, THOUGH I TELEPORTED OUR COMRADES TO WORLDS WHOSE COORDINATES THEY CARRIED IN THEIR MEMORY CIRCUITS--
--I CHOSE TO ACCOMPANY YOU TO THIS WORLD.
TWO SPACE-KNIGHTS CAN MORE EASILY ERADICATE WRAITHKIND THAN ONE.
IS THAT THE SOLE REASON FOR STAR-SHINE'S JOINING ROM...
...OR IS THERE ANOTHER, UNSPOKEN REASON HIDDEN DEEP WITHIN THE GOLDEN GLADIATRESS'S HEART?
ROM HESITATES. WITH GALADOR LOST TO HIM, HE REALIZES THAT HE HAD BEEN LOOKING FORWARD TO RETURNING TO EARTH, TO CLAIRTON, TO A WOMAN NAMED BRANDY CLARK.
YET... WHY? HALF HIS HUMANITY PERISHED ON GALADOR, DASHING HIS HOPES OF EVER BEING A MAN AGAIN.
STARSHINE'S HUMANITY IS LOST TO HER, TOO, IN A CRYOGENIC CRYPT ON GALADOR. CAN THEY NOT COMFORT EACH OTHER IN THEIR LONLINESS?
COME, CLAIRTON LIES IN THIS DIRECTION.
ROCKET PODS DRIVE THE SPACEKNIGHTS THROUGH THE AZURE WEST VIRGINIA SKIES...
...UNTIL, IN LESS TIME THEN IT TAKES TO TELL, ROM AND STARSHINE DROP DOWN TOWARDS CLAIRTON'S MAIN STREET.
GREETINGS, EARTH FRIENDS. ROM--SPACEKNIGHT--HAS RETURNED.
THE CLAIR-TONERS GAZE SKYWARD...
...AND THEN REACT IN INSTINCTIVE, ABJECT FEAR.
ROM, I THOUGHT YOU SAID THAT THESE BEINGS WERE YOUR FRIENDS--YOUR ALLIES?
I DO NOT UNDERSTAND IT, STARSHINE. ALL OF CLAIRTON KNOWS ME. ITS CITIZENS HAVE FOUGHT BESIDE ME TO DRIVE THE WRAITHS FROM THEIR TOWN.
PERHAPS IT IS YOU THEY ARE REACTING TO IN FRIGHT, NEVER HAVING SEEN ANOTHER SPACEKNIGHT?
3

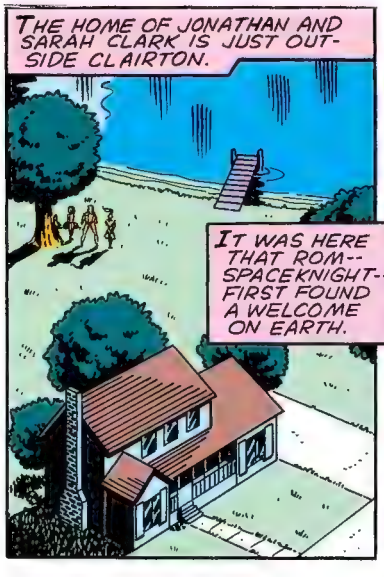

UPON HEARING ROM'S WORDS, A CHANGE COMES OVER THE FRIGHTENED CLAIRTONERS.
ANOTHER SPACE-KNIGHT? THEN WE HAVE NOTHING TO FEAR, ROM?
NOTHING AT ALL, WOMAN OF EARTH. STARSHINE IS A FRIEND.
WELL, ANY FRIEND OF YOURS, ROM--!
WELCOME, ROM-- WELCOME HOME!
HOME.
PERHAPS THE ONLY HOME HE WILL EVER AGAIN KNOW.
HI, LONE STRANGER! CLAIRTON'S BEEN QUIETER'N A LOSING TEAM'S LOCKER ROOM AFTER THE SUPER BOWL!
TORPEDO!
YEP! CLAIRTON'S RESIDENT SUPER HERO--AND YOUR STAND-IN WHENEVER WRAITH BUSINESS TAKES YOU OUT OF TOWN!
THERE HAS BEEN NO DIRE WRAITH ACTIVITY IN MY ABSENCE, THEN?
NOT A STITCH! I GUESS BETWEEN THE TWO OF US WE TAUGHT THOSE SHAPE-SHIFTING SPACE-BOGIES NOT TO MESS WITH THIS TOWN!
ROM, I WONDER IF PERHAPS YOU SHOULDN'T USE YOUR ENERGY ANALYZER, OR I MY LIGHTEYES, TO ASCERTAIN WHETHER THESE BEINGS ARE REALLY WHAT THEY APPEAR TO BE?
AFTER ALL, THE WRAITHS ARE ADEPT AT TAKING ON ANY FORM, EVEN THOSE OF A FRIEND.
SURE! ANALYZE US IF YOU WANT, ROM! WE'VE GOT NOTHING TO HIDE!
BUT FIRST, THERE'S A LITTLE LADY WHO'S BEEN WAITING FOR YOU TO GET BACK!
BRANDY.
THERE IS NO NEED TO ANALYZE THESE BEINGS, STARSHINE.
MY HEART TELLS ME THEY ARE WHO THEY APPEAR TO BE.
SOMETIMES EVEN OUR HEARTS ARE CAPABLE OF DECEIVING US, ROM.
MINE COULD NEVER FAIL TO RECOGNIZE YOU, BRANDY CLARK--
4

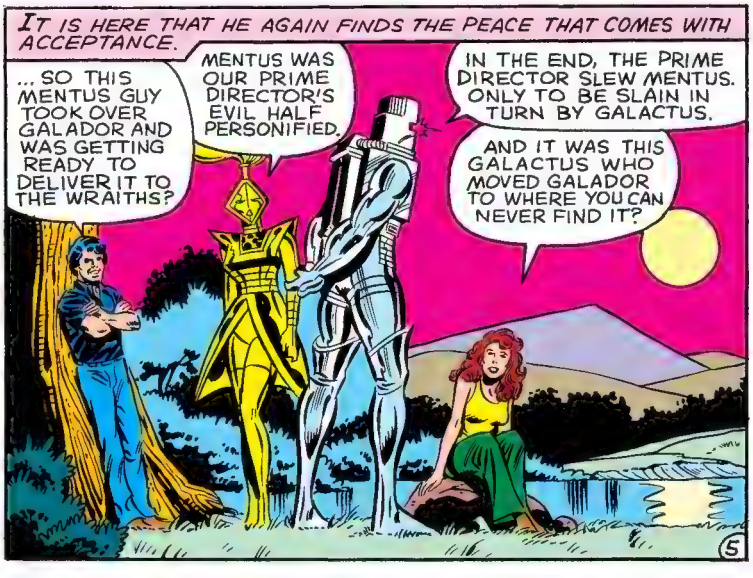

PERHAPS, IF JEALOUSY HADN'T CLOUDED STARSHINE'S COMMON SENSE, SHE WOULD HAVE INSISTED ON ANALYZING THE HUMANS.
PERHAPS, IF BRANDY'S BEAUTY HADN'T CLOUDED ROM'S JUDGEMENT, HE WOULD HAVE WONDERED WHY STEVE JACKSON, BRANDY'S BOYFRIEND SMILED SO ENCOURAGINGLY WHEN ROM AND BRANDY OPENED THEIR HEARTS TO EACH OTHER.
PERHAPS, IF WE HAD BEEN ABLE TO INTRUDE UPON THIS TALE, TELLING WHAT WE KNOW, IT MIGHT HAVE ENDED DIFFERENTLY.


PERHAPS.
YOU MUST BE TIRED. OH, YOU DON'T GET TIRED, DO YOU?
I HAVE TRAVELED VAST DISTANCES, FOUGHT MANY BATTLES. IT WOULD BE GOOD TO REST AND RECHARGE... AMONG FRIENDS.

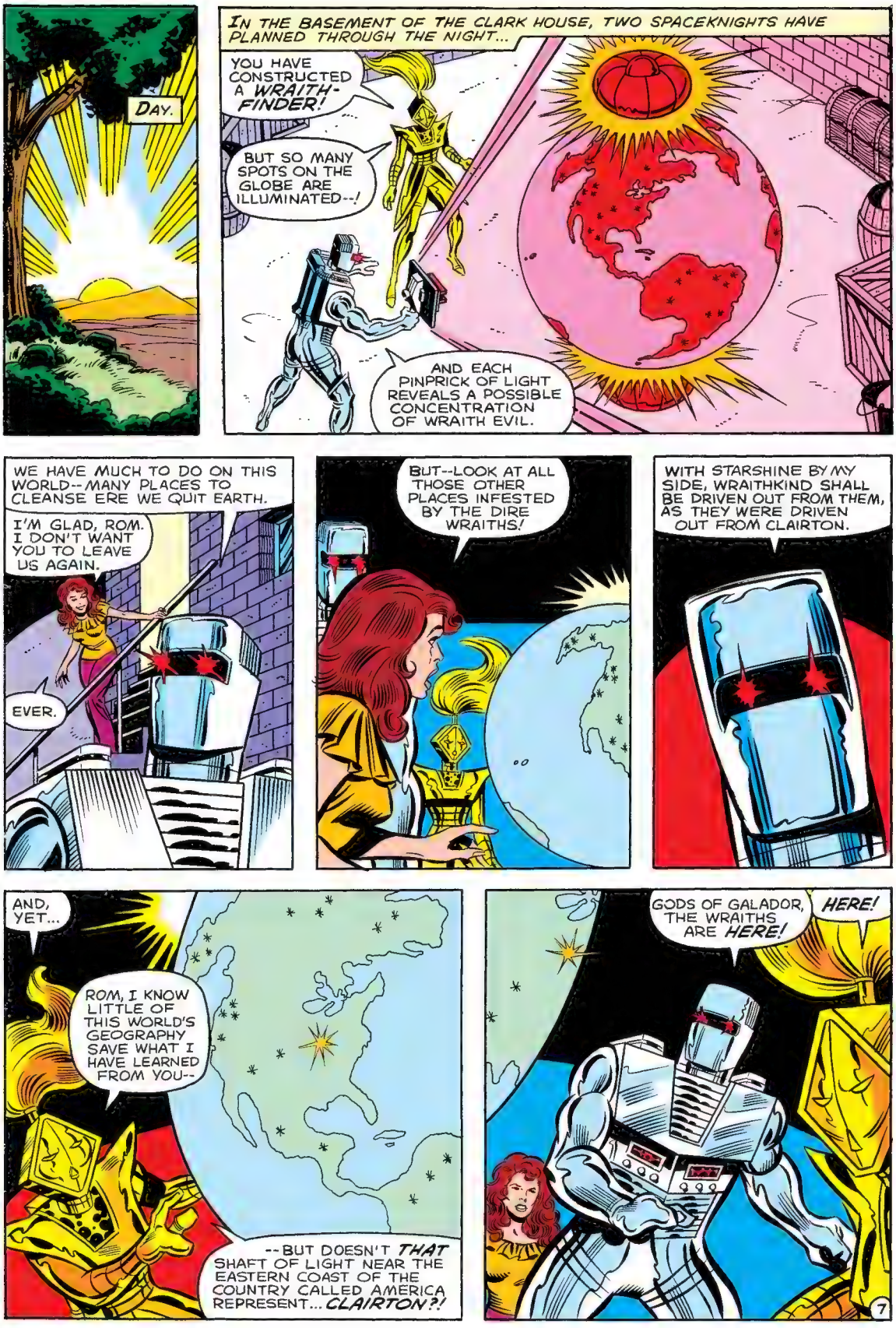

THEN, COME. MY PARENTS' HOUSE IS ALWAYS AT YOUR DISPOSAL.
I THINK YOU'RE INVITED TOO, LADY!
THE WEARY SPACEKNIGHTS ALLOW THEMSELVES TO BE LED AWAY...


... AND THE CLAIRTONERS WATCH THEM GO.
JACKS

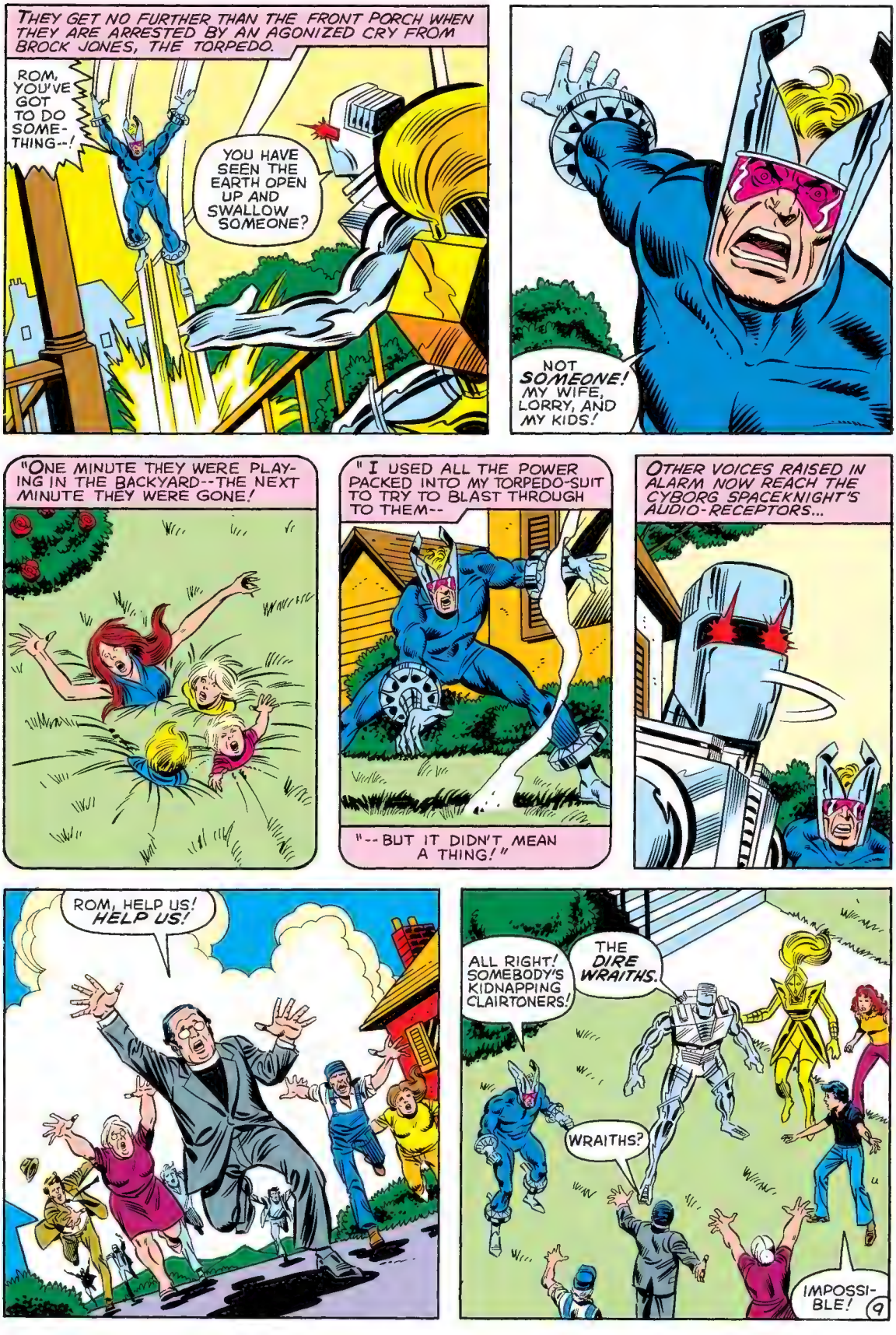

THE HOME OF JONATHAN AND SARAH CLARK IS JUST OUTSIDE CLAIRTON.
IT WAS HERE THAT ROM--SPACEKNIGHT--FIRST FOUND A WELCOME ON EARTH.

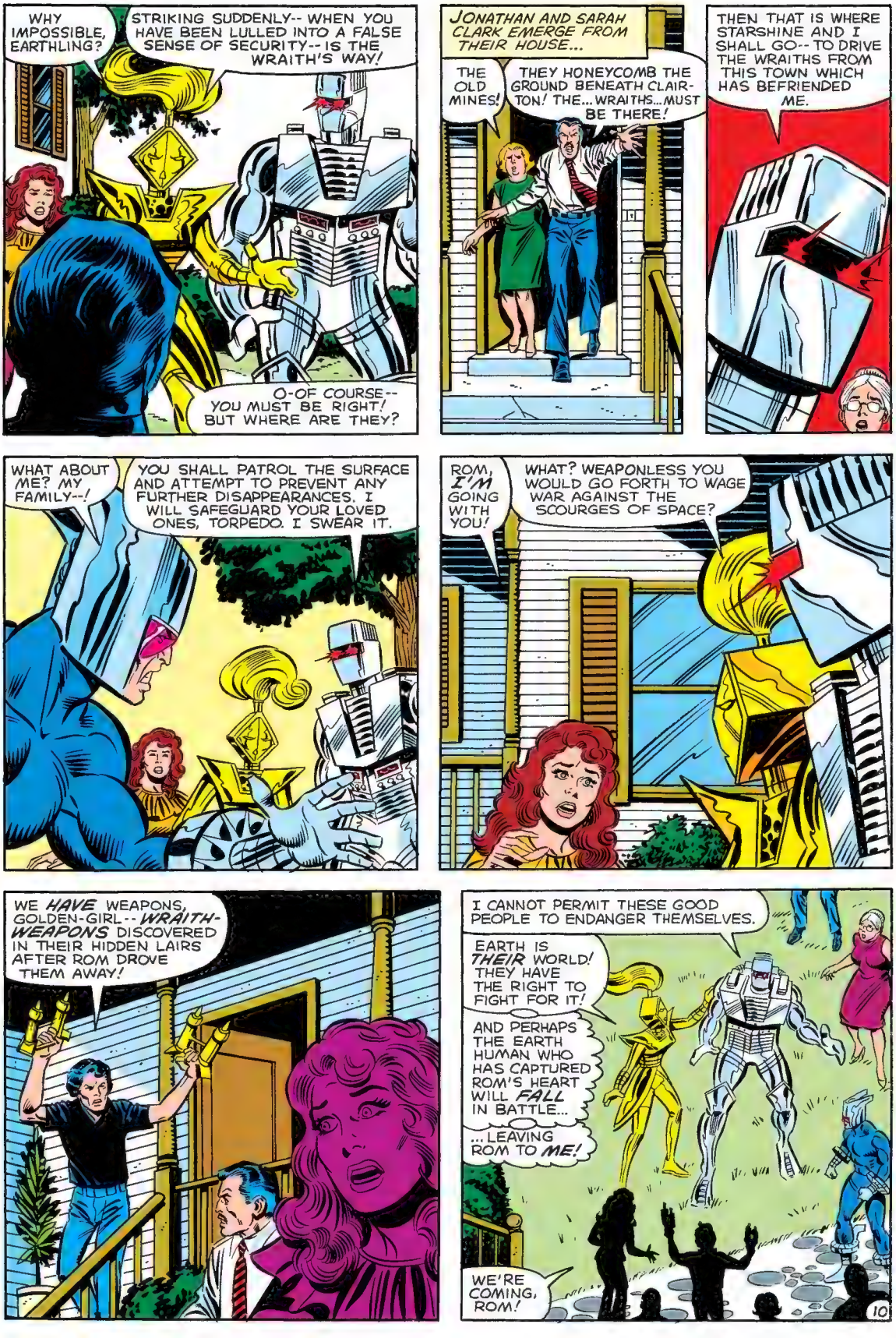

IT IS HERE THAT HE AGAIN FINDS THE PEACE THAT COMES WITH ACCEPTANCE.
... SO THIS MENTUS GUY TOOK OVER GALADOR AND WAS GETTING READY TO DELIVER IT TO THE WRAITHS?
MENTUS WAS OUR PRIME DIRECTOR'S EVIL HALF PERSONIFIED.
IN THE END, THE PRIME DIRECTOR SLEW MENTUS. ONLY TO BE SLAIN IN TURN BY GALACTUS.
AND IT WAS THIS GALACTUS WHO MOVED GALADOR TO WHERE YOU CAN NEVER FIND IT?

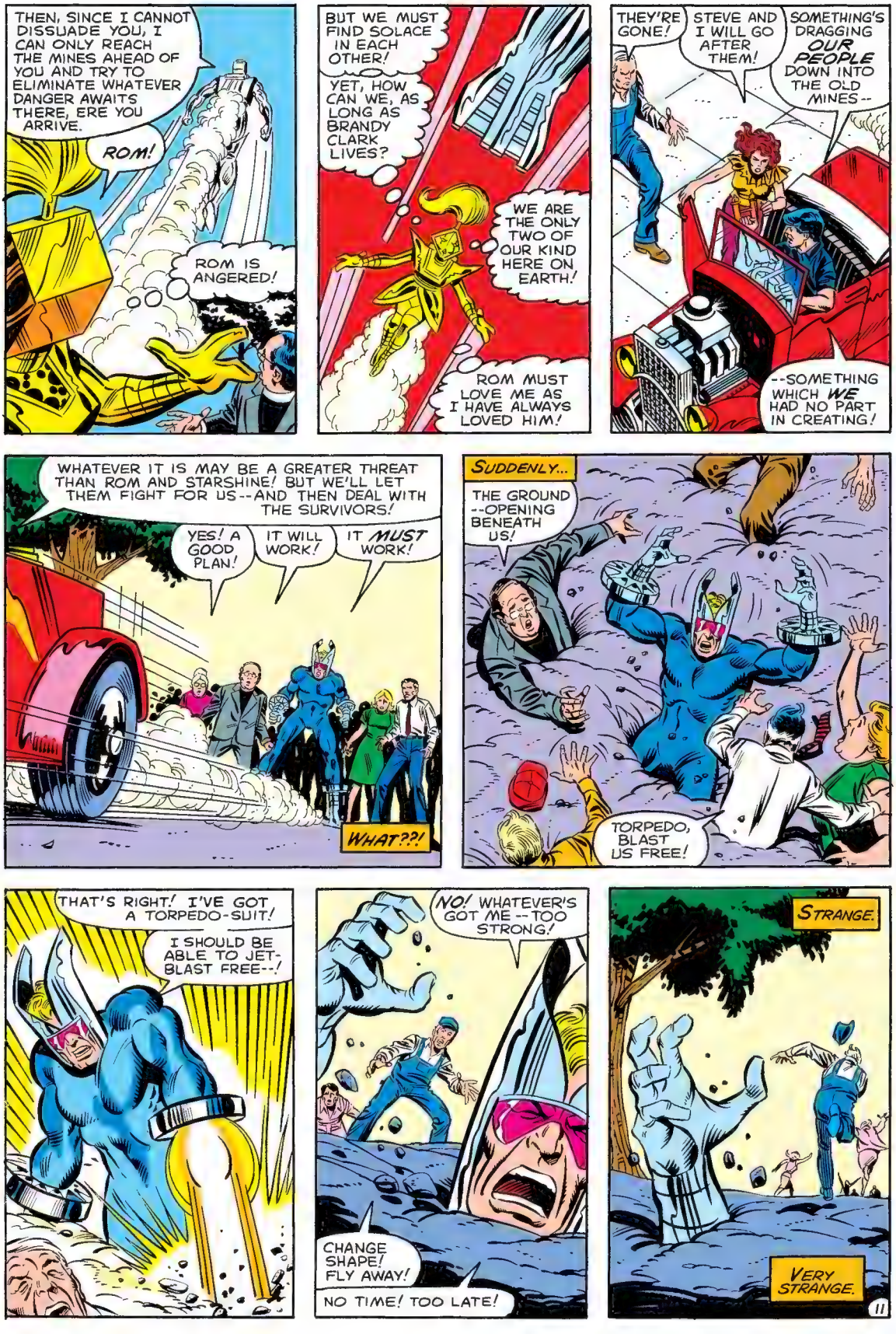
WE SHALL FIND OUR HOMEWORLD, EARTH-WOMAN, NO MATTER HOW MANY EONS IT TAKES!
BUT FIRST WE MUST BE TRUE TO OUR MISSION--TO ERADICATE WRAITHKIND WHEREVER IT MAY BE FOUND.
WELL, IT'S NOT HERE IN CLAIRTON! YOU SAW TO THAT, ROM!
THEN WHY ARE WE HERE, SPACE-KNIGHT?
THIS SMALL SECTOR OF EARTH HAS BEEN CLEANSED, STARSHINE--BUT THERE IS A WIDE WORLD BEYOND, WHICH I FEAR THE WRAITHS HAVE ALREADY INFILTRATED.
JUST THEN...
HEY, LOOK! IT'S THE TORPEDO!
HE'S KEEPING AN EYE ON THINGS!
THIS... HOME... YOU HAVE FOUND FOR YOURSELF DOES INDEED SEEM SAFE AND SECURE, ROM.
WE CANNOT REST UNTIL ALL OF EARTH IS MADE AS SAFE; AS SECURE, STARSHINE.
WELL, LISTEN--WHEN YOU DECIDE WHAT YOU'RE GOING TO DO NEXT, LET US KNOW!
WE WILL, STEVE JACKSON.
I... ENVY... THE CLOSENESS YOU HAVE FOUND WITH THESE HUMANS.
BUT REMEMBER THAT THEY ARE HUMAN, ROM--
--WHILE OUR HUMANITY HAS BEEN TAKEN FROM US. IN TRUTH, WE MUST BE CLOSE TO EACH OTHER, NOW.
AS THE TWO SPACEKNIGHTS COME TO GRIPS WITH WHAT HAS HAPPENED TO THEM...
...A QUARTET OF FAMILIAR FACES STARES OUT AT THEM, NOTING THEIR EVERY MOVE.
STRANGE.
6


DAY.
IN THE BASEMENT OF THE CLARK HOUSE, TWO SPACEKNIGHTS HAVE PLANNED THROUGH THE NIGHT...
YOU HAVE CONSTRUCTED A WRAITH-FINDER!
BUT SO MANY SPOTS ON THE GLOBE ARE ILLUMINATED--!
AND EACH PINPRICK OF LIGHT REVEALS A POSSIBLE CONCENTRATION OF WRAITH EVIL.
WE HAVE MUCH TO DO ON THIS WORLD--MANY PLACES TO CLEANSE ERE WE QUIT EARTH.
I'M GLAD, ROM. I DON'T WANT YOU TO LEAVE US AGAIN.
EVER.
BUT--LOOK AT ALL THOSE OTHER PLACES INFESTED BY THE DIRE WRAITHS!
WITH STARSHINE BY MY SIDE, WRAITHKIND SHALL BE DRIVEN OUT FROM THEM, AS THEY WERE DRIVEN OUT FROM CLAIRTON.
AND, YET...
ROM, I KNOW LITTLE OF THIS WORLD'S GEOGRAPHY SAVE WHAT I HAVE LEARNED FROM YOU--
--BUT DOESN'T THAT SHAFT OF LIGHT NEAR THE EASTERN COAST OF THE COUNTRY CALLED AMERICA REPRESENT... CLAIRTON?!
GODS OF GALADOR, THE WRAITHS ARE HERE!
HERE!
7

HERE!
SOMETHING'S HAPPENING HERE IN CLAIRTON! SOMETHING HORRIBLE!
WHAT IS IT, STEVE JACKSON? WHAT IS WRONG?
EVERYTHING! I WAS DRIVING MY CAR TO MY GARAGE THIS MORNING...
"ON THE WAY, I PASSED SID BENNET OUT TENDING HIS YARD."
HI, SID!
MORNING, STEVE!
"SUDDENLY, THE GROUND SEEMED TO OPEN UP UNDER SID--
WHAT--?!
STEVE, HELP ME!!
"--AND, BEFORE I COULD REACH HIM, HE WAS DRAGGED DOWN OUT OF SIGHT!"
I KNOW IT SOUNDS INSANE, BUT THE GROUND CLOSED UP AGAIN AS IF NOTHING HAD EVER HAPPENED--ONLY SID WAS GONE!
I HAVE NEVER KNOWN THE WRAITHS TO SEIZE VICTIMS IN SUCH A MANNER--
--AND YET, IT MUST BE THEY, FOR THEIR PRESENCE HAS AGAIN BEEN DETECTED IN CLAIRTON!
8

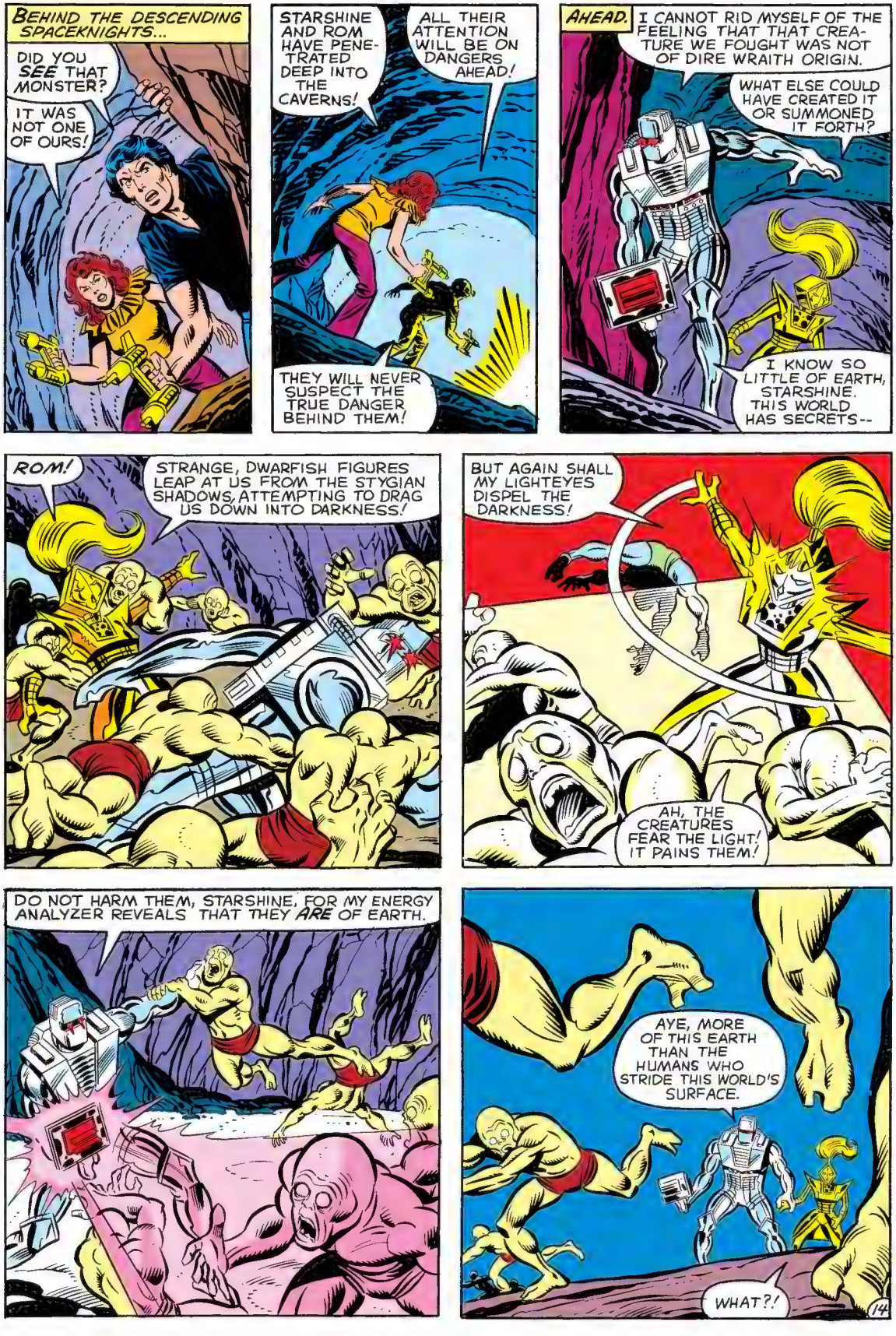

THEY GET NO FURTHER THAN THE FRONT PORCH WHEN THEY ARE ARRESTED BY AN AGONIZED CRY FROM BROCK JONES, THE TORPEDO.
ROM, YOU'VE GOT TO DO SOME-THING--!
YOU HAVE SEEN THE EARTH OPEN UP AND SWALLOW SOMEONE?
NOT SOMEONE! MY WIFE, LORRY, AND MY KIDS!
"ONE MINUTE THEY WERE PLAY-ING IN THE BACKYARD--THE NEXT MINUTE THEY WERE GONE!
"I USED ALL THE POWER PACKED INTO MY TORPEDO-SUIT TO TRY TO BLAST THROUGH TO THEM--
"--BUT IT DIDN'T MEAN A THING!"
OTHER VOICES RAISED IN ALARM NOW REACH THE CYBORG SPACEKNIGHT'S AUDIO-RECEPTORS...
ROM, HELP US! HELP US!
ALL RIGHT! SOMEBODY'S KIDNAPPING CLAIRTONERS!
THE DIRE WRAITHS.
WRAITHS?
IMPOSSI-BLE!
9


WHY IMPOSSIBLE, EARTHLING?
STRIKING SUDDENLY-- WHEN YOU HAVE BEEN LULLED INTO A FALSE SENSE OF SECURITY-- IS THE WRAITH'S WAY!
O-OF COURSE-- YOU MUST BE RIGHT! BUT WHERE ARE THEY?
JONATHAN AND SARAH CLARK EMERGE FROM THEIR HOUSE...
THE OLD MINES!
THEY HONEYCOMB THE GROUND BENEATH CLAIRTON! THE... WRAITHS... MUST BE THERE!
THEN THAT IS WHERE STARSHINE AND I SHALL GO-- TO DRIVE THE WRAITHS FROM THIS TOWN WHICH HAS BEFRIENDED ME.
WHAT ABOUT ME? MY FAMILY--!
YOU SHALL PATROL THE SURFACE AND ATTEMPT TO PREVENT ANY FURTHER DISAPPEARANCES. I WILL SAFEGUARD YOUR LOVED ONES, TORPEDO. I SWEAR IT.
ROM, I'M GOING WITH YOU!
WHAT? WEAPONLESS YOU WOULD GO FORTH TO WAGE WAR AGAINST THE SCOURGES OF SPACE?
WE HAVE WEAPONS, GOLDEN-GIRL-- WRAITH-WEAPONS DISCOVERED IN THEIR HIDDEN LAIRS AFTER ROM DROVE THEM AWAY!
I CANNOT PERMIT THESE GOOD PEOPLE TO ENDANGER THEMSELVES.
EARTH IS THEIR WORLD! THEY HAVE THE RIGHT TO FIGHT FOR IT!
AND PERHAPS THE EARTH HUMAN WHO HAS CAPTURED ROM'S HEART WILL FALL IN BATTLE...
...LEAVING ROM TO ME!
WE'RE COMING, ROM!
10


THEN, SINCE I CANNOT DISSUADE YOU, I CAN ONLY REACH THE MINES AHEAD OF YOU AND TRY TO ELIMINATE WHATEVER DANGER AWAITS THERE, ERE YOU ARRIVE.
ROM!
ROM IS ANGERED!
BUT WE MUST FIND SOLACE IN EACH OTHER!
YET, HOW CAN WE, AS LONG AS BRANDY CLARK LIVES?
WE ARE THE ONLY TWO OF OUR KIND HERE ON EARTH!
ROM MUST LOVE ME AS I HAVE ALWAYS LOVED HIM!
THEY'RE GONE!
STEVE AND I WILL GO AFTER THEM!
SOMETHING'S DRAGGING OUR PEOPLE DOWN INTO THE OLD MINES--
--SOMETHING WHICH WE HAD NO PART IN CREATING!
WHATEVER IT IS MAY BE A GREATER THREAT THAN ROM AND STARSHINE! BUT WE'LL LET THEM FIGHT FOR US--AND THEN DEAL WITH THE SURVIVORS!
YES! A GOOD PLAN!
IT WILL WORK!
IT MUST WORK!
WHAT??!
SUDDENLY...
THE GROUND --OPENING BENEATH US!
TORPEDO, BLAST US FREE!
THAT'S RIGHT! I'VE GOT A TORPEDO-SUIT!
I SHOULD BE ABLE TO JET-BLAST FREE--!
NO! WHATEVER'S GOT ME--TOO STRONG!
CHANGE SHAPE! FLY AWAY!
NO TIME! TOO LATE!
STRANGE.
VERY STRANGE.
11

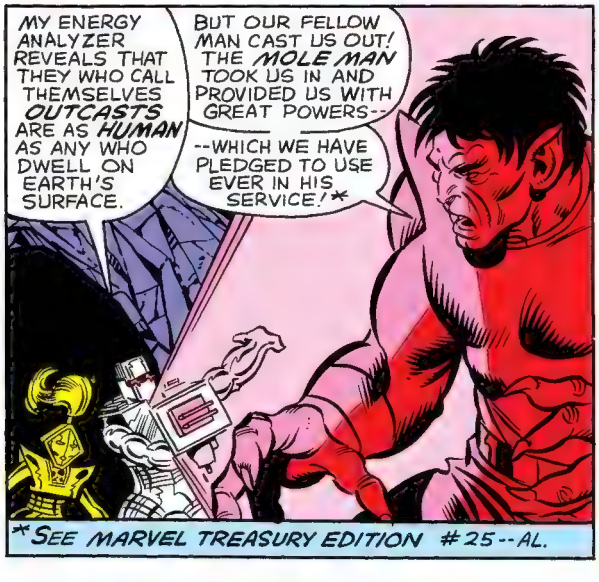
THE OLD MINES.
THE HUMANS ARE NEITHER COWARDS NOR WEAKLINGS, STARSHINE. THEY HAVE FOUGHT FOR THEIR TOWN.
BUT I DID NOT WISH TO RUSH THEM HEADLONG INTO DANGER!
BUT IF SOMETHING WERE TO HAPPEN TO THE EARTHLING CALLED STEVE JACKSON, ROM--
--WOULDN'T YOU FEEL THAT AN OBSTACLE HAD BEEN REMOVED BETWEEN YOU AND BRANDY CLARK?
WOULDN'T YOU THEN FEEL THAT YOU HAD THE RIGHT TO PROFESS YOUR LOVE TO HER?
AND, BY THE SAME TOKEN, IF SOME MISHAP SHOULD REMOVE BRANDY FROM THE LIVING, I WOULD FEEL FREE TO PROFESS MY LOVE FOR YOU!
IT COULD ALL BE BLAMED ON THE DIRE WRAITHS!
THINKING THOUGHTS UNWORTHY OF A SPACEKNIGHT, STARSHINE LEADS ROM DOWN INTO THE DARKLING MINES...
...WHILE CLOSE ON THEIR HEELS COME STEVE JACKSON AND BRANDY CLARK.
ARE YOU SURE IT'S THIS MINE?
I SAW THE TRAIL LEFT BY ROM'S POCKET-PODS ARC DOWN AROUND HERE!
AND THEIR SPACEKNIGHT STINK IS ALL AROUND!
THIS IS A PERFECT PLACE FOR BETRAYAL!
DOWN.
ROM, SOMETHING IS AMISS!
WHY? WHAT DO YOUR LIGHTEYES REVEAL?
MY LIGHTEYES-VISION DETECTS NOTHING BUT DARKNESS AND MORE DARKNESS!
MY AUDIO-RECEPTORS, HOWEVEVER, ARE PICKING UP THE SOUNDS OF SOMETHING LARGE BURROWING THROUGH THE STONE!
AYE, NOW I HEAR IT TOO! WHAT--?
SKKKRR--!
12

MURDER-MOLE!
RAAK!
FROM DARK-NESS IT COMES--
--TO DEAL DEATH!
FKLANG!
DEMONS OF THE DARK NEBULA--WHAT MANNER OF CREATURE IS IT?!
THAT IS WHAT MY ENERGY ANALYZER MUST DETERMINE.
YOUR ANALYZER? BY THE TIME YOU DISCOVER WHETHER THE MONSTER BE OF WRAITH OR EARTH ORIGIN, IT COULD TWIST OUR SPACEKNIGHT ARMOR INTO SCRAP!
I AM PLEDGED TO SAFEGUARD ALL LIFE-FORMS INDIGENOUS TO THIS PLANET!
AND I AM PLEDGED TO PROTECT MY FELLOW SPACEKNIGHTS!
SKREE!
THE CREATURE FLEES, BLINDED BY YOUR LIGHTEYES. YET WHY DID IT ATTACK AT ALL?
IT WAS SENT BY ITS WRAITH MAS-TERS!
I AM NOT SURE, STAR-SHINE. I AM NOT SURE.
13


BEHIND THE DESCENDING SPACEKNIGHTS...
DID YOU SEE THAT MONSTER?
IT WAS NOT ONE OF OURS!
STARSHINE AND ROM HAVE PENETRATED DEEP INTO THE CAVERNS!
ALL THEIR ATTENTION WILL BE ON DANGERS AHEAD!
THEY WILL NEVER SUSPECT THE TRUE DANGER BEHIND THEM!
AHEAD.
I CANNOT RID MYSELF OF THE FEELING THAT THAT CREATURE WE FOUGHT WAS NOT OF DIRE WRAITH ORIGIN.
WHAT ELSE COULD HAVE CREATED IT OR SUMMONED IT FORTH?
I KNOW SO LITTLE OF EARTH, STARSHINE. THIS WORLD HAS SECRETS--
ROM!
STRANGE, DWARFISH FIGURES LEAP AT US FROM THE STYGIAN SHADOWS, ATTEMPTING TO DRAG US DOWN INTO DARKNESS!
BUT AGAIN SHALL MY LIGHTEYES DISPEL THE DARKNESS!
AH, THE CREATURES FEAR THE LIGHT! IT PAINS THEM!
DO NOT HARM THEM, STARSHINE, FOR MY ENERGY ANALYZER REVEALS THAT THEY ARE OF EARTH.
AYE, MORE OF THIS EARTH THAN THE HUMANS WHO STRIDE THIS WORLD'S SURFACE.
WHAT?!
14

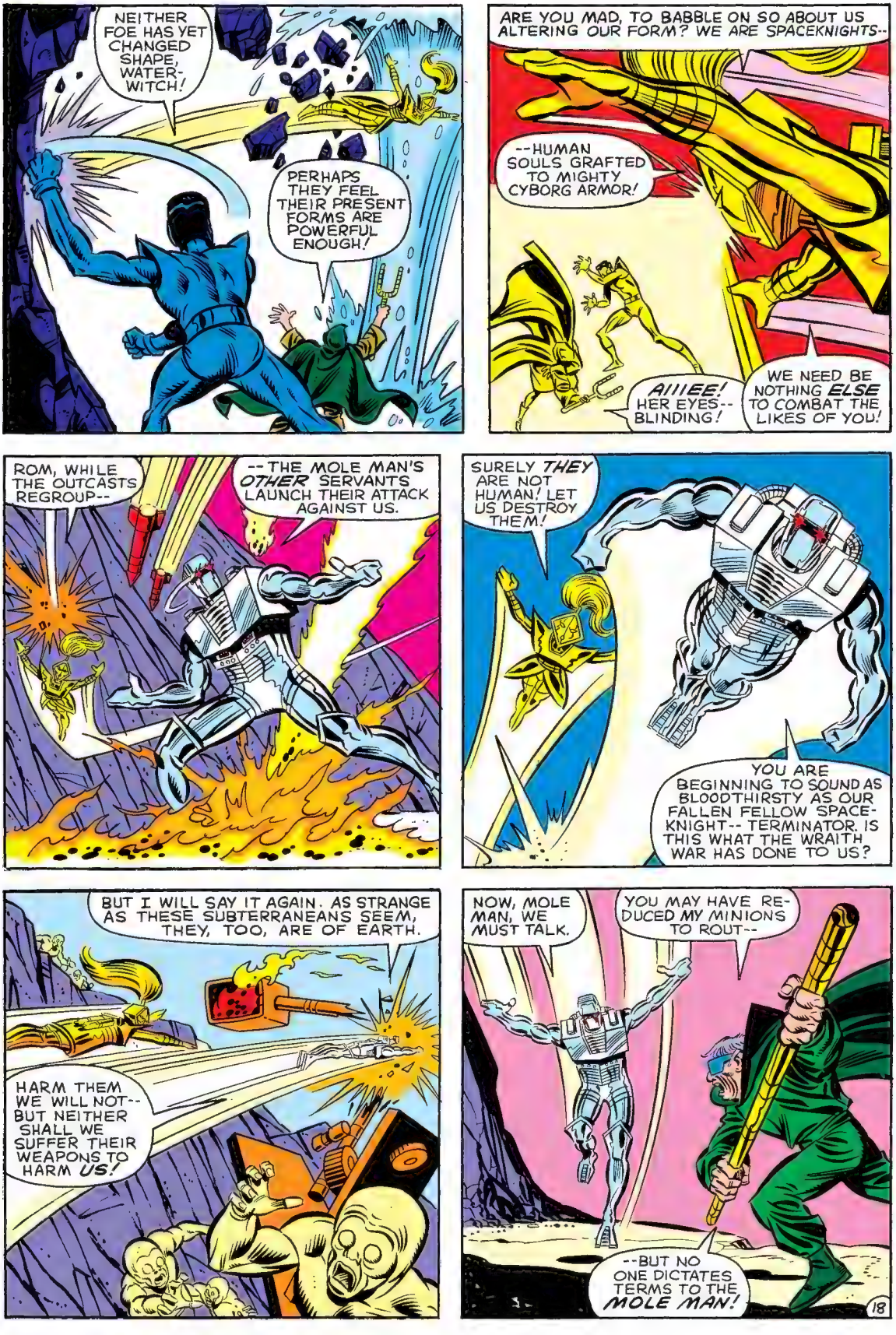
I DO NOT PROFESS TO UNDERSTAND YET, FAIR STARSHINE--YET I SHALL-- AND THE ANSWER I SUSPECT--
--IS TO BE FOUND IN DEEPER DARKNESS STILL.
BEHIND THE DESCENDING SPACE-KNIGHTS, THEIR PINK-SKINNED ATTACKERS FLEE...
...INTO DEADLY RAY-FIRE!
WHO ARE THEY? WHAT ARE THEY?
THEY ARE NOT OF US, SO CUT THEM DOWN!
VREET
SQUEEEE
VREET
VREEET
SQUEEEE
SUCH STRANGE SCREAMS!
YET THEY DIDN'T SEEM TO POSSESS THE INTELLI-GENCE--
--TO DEVISE A PLAN WHEREBY OUR PEOPLE WOULD BE CAUGHT UN-AWARES AND DRAGGED, SCREAMING, BELOW THE EARTH!
YET SOMEONE DID DEVISE SUCH A PLAN!
YES, AND THAT SOMEONE WILL PAY FOR IT WITH HIS LIFE!
DEEPER.
ROM, CAN IT BE THAT THIS WORLD IS HOME TO MORE THAN ONE RACE OF BEINGS?
IT IS A QUESTION I NEVER THOUGHT TO ASK THOSE HUMANS WITH WHOM I HAVE COME IN CONTACT, STARSHINE--
--NOR HAVE THEY EVER PROFERRED ANY SUCH INFORMATION.
IN SHORT, I DO NOT KNOW.
THEN PREPARE TO BE ENLIGHTENED METAL MONSTER--
15

--FOR YOU HAVE JUST ENTERED THE KINGDOM OF THE MOLE MAN!
THE MENACE WE WERE WARNED WOULD COME TO SUBTERRANEA... HAS COME!
THEN WE OUTCASTS WILL DRIVE IT OUT-- OR DIE TRYING!
ROM, WHAT KIND OF BEINGS ARE THESE?!?

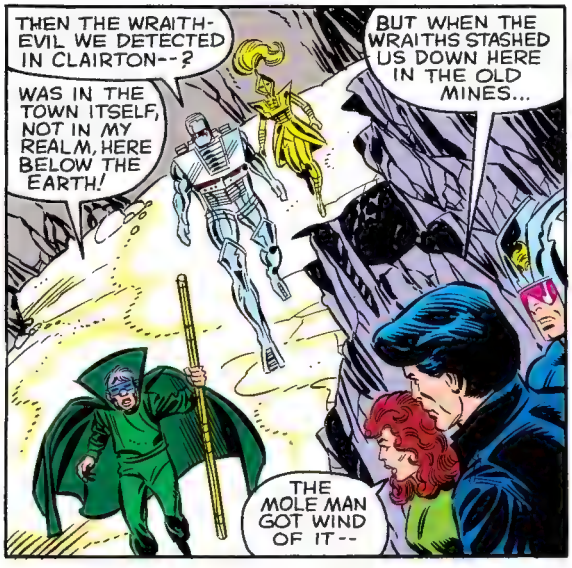

MY ENERGY ANALYZER REVEALS THAT THEY WHO CALL THEMSELVES OUTCASTS ARE AS HUMAN AS ANY WHO DWELL ON EARTH'S SURFACE.
BUT OUR FELLOW MAN CAST US OUT! THE MOLE MAN TOOK US IN AND PROVIDED US WITH GREAT POWERS--
--WHICH WE HAVE PLEDGED TO USE EVER IN HIS SERVICE!*
*SEE MARVEL TREASURY EDITION #25--AL.

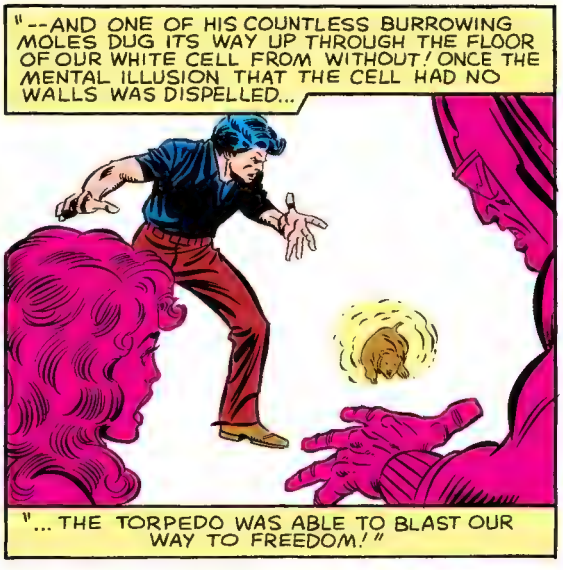
I REQUIRE YOU TO USE YOUR POWERS NOW, DIGGER!
OTHER RUFUGEES FROM THE SURFACEWORLD ABOVE HAVE PETITIONED ME FOR PROTECTION! AT FIRST, I HESITATED! NOW I SEE THAT THE SAME DANGER THAT OVERTOOK THEM HAS SPILLED OVER INTO SUBTERRANEA! SLAY THOSE WHO WOULD INVADE MY REALM!
16

AS THE MOLE MAN COMMANDS, SO SHALL WE OUTCASTS OBEY!
STAND ASIDE, DIGGER! LET BOULDER AT THEM FIRST!
WATER-WITCH THINKS WE'LL ALL SEE FIGHTING A'PLENTY!
LAND-SLIDE WISHES IT WERE NOT SO!
ROM, WHAT DO WE DO? IF INDEED EARTH--AND NOT THE DARK NEBULA--GAVE RISE TO THESE BEINGS...
YOUR PACIFISM WILL BE YOUR DEATH, EARTH-MOVER!
THEN WE CANNOT CAUSE THEM HARM, STARSHINE, LEST WE VIOLATE OUR SPACEKNIGHT CODE.
YOU ARE ENCASED IN METAL, ALIEN--
SCRAAPE!
--BUT DIGGER CAN SLICE THROUGH ANYTHING!
NOT GALADOR-FORGED ARMOR, HUMAN.
NOW, AWAY! I WILL NOT FIGHT YOU!
FIGHT OR NO, YOU WILL NONETHELESS FALL, FOR CRIMES YOU HAVE ALREADY COMMITTED!
THE OTHERS HAVE TOLD US OF YOUR KIND.
MY... KIND?
YES! HOW, BY CHANGING YOUR SHAPE, YOU WILL ATTEMPT TO ESCAPE HARM!
BUT NOTHING CAN BREAK THE GRIP OF BOULDER!
YOU YOURSELF SHALL LEAVE GO, HUMAN, LEST YOUR ARMS BE BURNED BY MY IGNITING ROCKET-PODS.
YOU WARNED ME SO THAT I COULD LET YOU LOOSE--?
FROARR
I HAVE ALREADY SAID THAT I WILL NOT FIGHT WITH YOU.
17

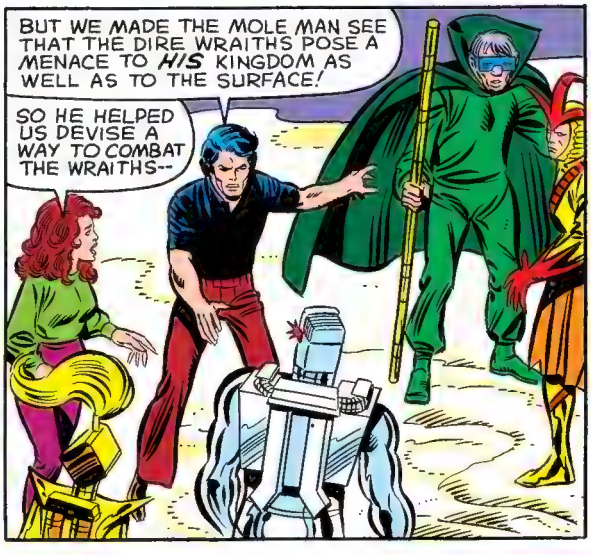

NEITHER FOE HAS YET CHANGED SHAPE, WATER-WITCH!
PERHAPS THEY FEEL THEIR PRESENT FORMS ARE POWERFUL ENOUGH!
ARE YOU MAD, TO BABBLE ON SO ABOUT US ALTERING OUR FORM? WE ARE SPACEKNIGHTS--
--HUMAN SOULS GRAFTED TO MIGHTY CYBORG ARMOR!
AIIIEE! HER EYES-- BLINDING!
WE NEED BE NOTHING ELSE TO COMBAT THE LIKES OF YOU!
ROM, WHILE THE OUTCASTS REGROUP--
--THE MOLE MAN'S OTHER SERVANTS LAUNCH THEIR ATTACK AGAINST US.
SURELY THEY ARE NOT HUMAN! LET US DESTROY THEM!
YOU ARE BEGINNING TO SOUND AS BLOODTHIRSTY AS OUR FALLEN FELLOW SPACE-KNIGHT-- TERMINATOR. IS THIS WHAT THE WRAITH WAR HAS DONE TO US?
BUT I WILL SAY IT AGAIN. AS STRANGE AS THESE SUBTERRANEANS SEEM, THEY, TOO, ARE OF EARTH.
HARM THEM WE WILL NOT-- BUT NEITHER SHALL WE SUFFER THEIR WEAPONS TO HARM US!
NOW, MOLE MAN, WE MUST TALK.
YOU MAY HAVE RE-DUCED MY MINIONS TO ROUT--
--BUT NO ONE DICTATES TERMS TO THE MOLE MAN!
18

SILENCE, YOU GNOMISH GROTESQUERIE!
STARSHINE CEASE! YOU ARE BLINDING HIM!
DO YOU NOT UNDERSTAND YET? OUR SPACE-KNIGHT CODE PLEDGES US TO PROTECT ALL LIFE ON EARTH--NOT JUST THE HUMANS WHO ARE SO LIKE US IN FORM!
YOU--? PLEDGED TO PROTECT HUMANITY?
BUT IT WAS HUMANS WHO CAME TO ME SEEKING PROTECTION FROM YOU!
OH, NO, MOLE MAN--NOT FROM ROM!
THAT BIG SILVER DUDE'S THE GUY WHO'S BEEN BATTLING TO MAKE EARTH WRAITH-FREE!
BRANDY! STEVE! TORPEDO! THEN HAS THE MOLE MAN DRAGGED YOU DOWN INTO HIS REALM AS WELL?
WHOA! I CAN SEE THERE'S BEEN A BREAKDOWN IN COMMUNICATIONS HERE!
THE MOLE MAN DIDN'T SNATCH US AWAY FROM CLAIRTON, ROM--IT WAS THE DIRE WRAITHS! THEY KIDNAPPED AND DUPLICATED US TO SET A TRAP FOR YOU!
"FIRST AN EERIE FOG SUMMONED FORTH BY DIRE WRAITH SORCERY SPREAD ALL OVER CLAIRTON, LEAVING US MINDLESS ZOMBIES!
"THEN THE WRAITHS IMPRISONED US IN A WALL-LESS WHITE CELL--
"--FROM WHICH NOT EVEN THE TORPEDO COULD FIND A WAY OUT!"
19

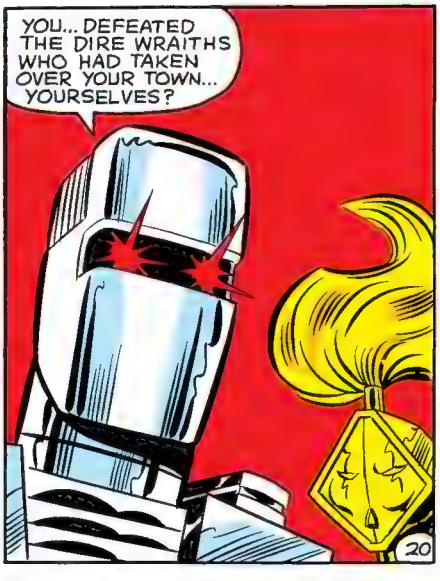

THEN THE WRAITH-EVIL WE DETECTED IN CLAIRTON--?
WAS IN THE TOWN ITSELF, NOT IN MY REALM, HERE BELOW THE EARTH!
BUT WHEN THE WRAITHS STASHED US DOWN HERE IN THE OLD MINES...
THE MOLE MAN GOT WIND OF IT--

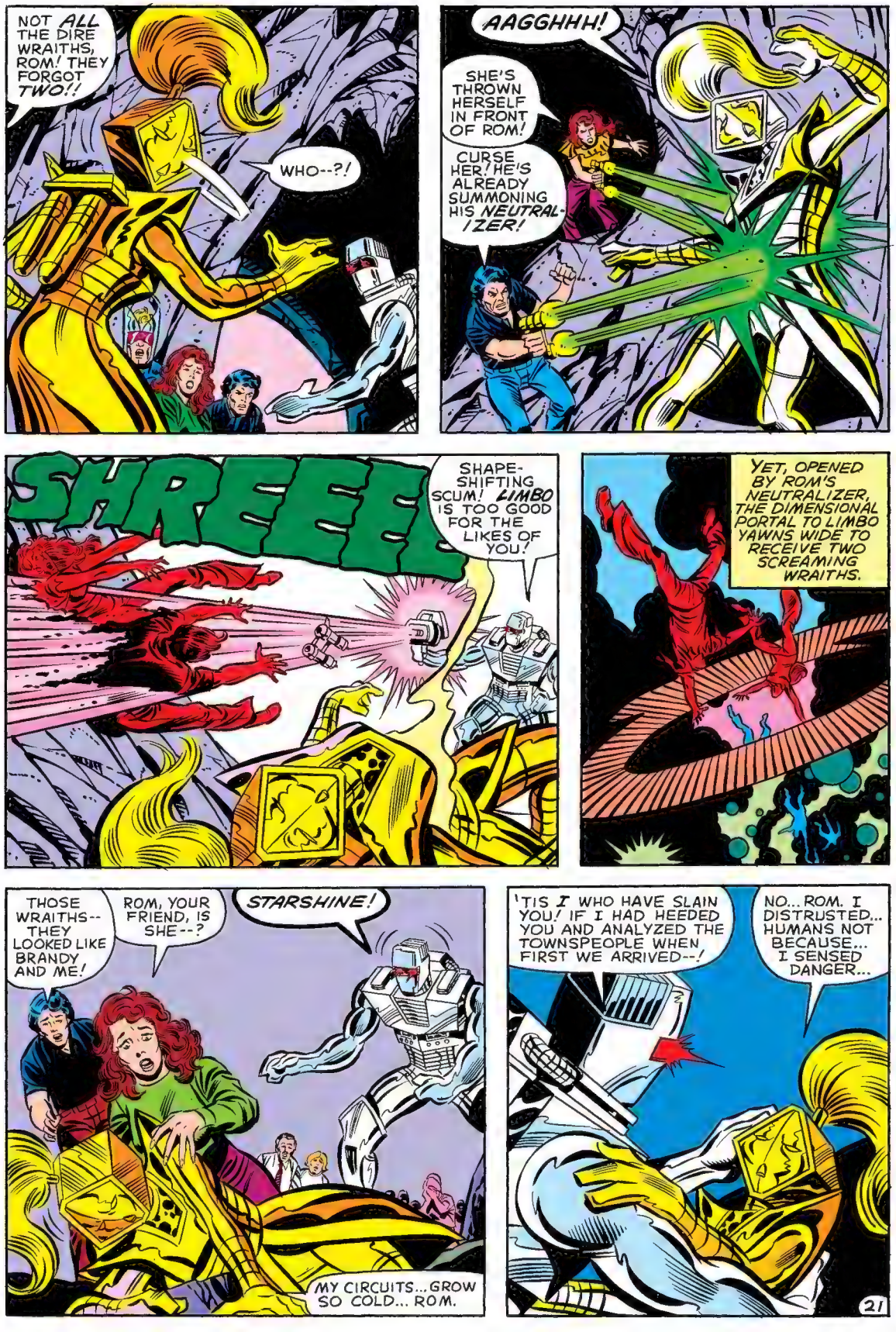

"--AND ONE OF HIS COUNTLESS BURROWING MOLES DUG ITS WAY UP THROUGH THE FLOOR OF OUR WHITE CELL FROM WITHOUT! ONCE THE MENTAL ILLUSION THAT THE CELL HAD NO WALLS WAS DISPELLED...
"... THE TORPEDO WAS ABLE TO BLAST OUR WAY TO FREEDOM!"

I HATE THE SURFACE-WORLD! DECADES AGO I DESCENDED HERE INTO DARKNESS TO ESCAPE ITS RIDICULE! SINCE THEN, OTHERS--LIKE THE OUTCASTS--HAVE JOINED ME IN EXILE!
I WISH ONLY TO LIVE OUT MY YEARS IN PEACE WITH MY AGED QUEEN KALA BY MY SIDE!

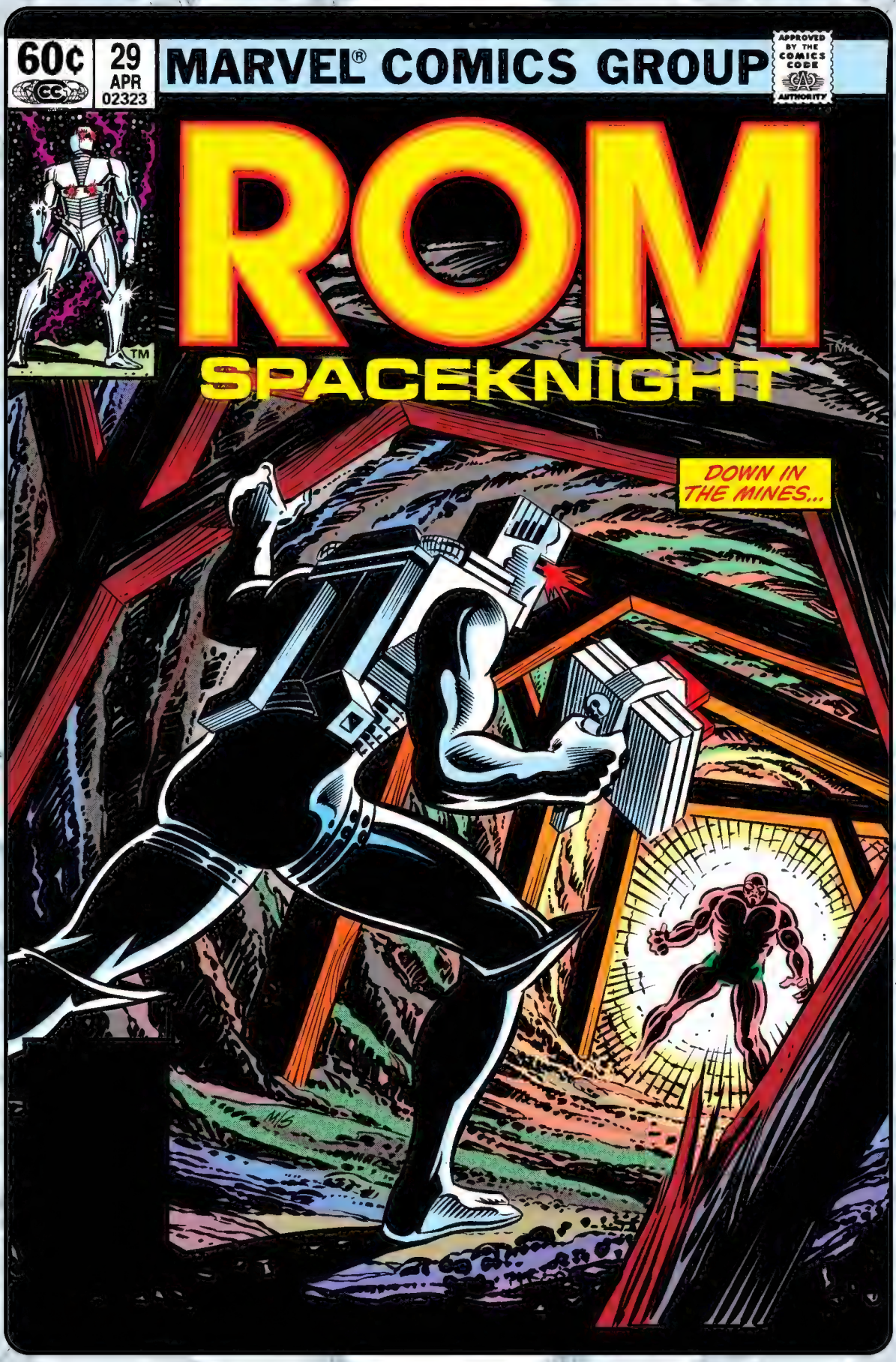

BUT WE MADE THE MOLE MAN SEE THAT THE DIRE WRAITHS POSE A MENACE TO HIS KINGDOM AS WELL AS TO THE SURFACE!
SO HE HELPED US DEVISE A WAY TO COMBAT THE WRAITHS--

"--BY DRAGGING THEM DOWN BELOW THE SURFACE AND OVERPOWERING THEM BEFORE THEY COULD SHIFT SHAPES AND ESCAPE!"


YOU... DEFEATED THE DIRE WRAITHS WHO HAD TAKEN OVER YOUR TOWN... YOURSELVES?
20


NOT ALL THE DIRE WRAITHS, ROM! THEY FORGOT TWO!!
WHO--?!
AAGGHHH!
SHE'S THROWN HERSELF IN FRONT OF ROM!
CURSE HER! HE'S ALREADY SUMMONING HIS NEUTRAL-IZER!
SHREEE
SHAPE-SHIFTING SCUM! LIMBO IS TOO GOOD FOR THE LIKES OF YOU!
YET, OPENED BY ROM'S NEUTRALIZER, THE DIMENSIONAL PORTAL TO LIMBO YAWNS WIDE TO RECEIVE TWO SCREAMING WRAITHS.
THOSE WRAITHS-- THEY LOOKED LIKE BRANDY AND ME!
ROM, YOUR FRIEND, IS SHE--?
STARSHINE!
MY CIRCUITS... GROW SO COLD... ROM.
'TIS I WHO HAVE SLAIN YOU! IF I HAD HEEDED YOU AND ANALYZED THE TOWNSPEOPLE WHEN FIRST WE ARRIVED--!
NO... ROM. I DISTRUSTED... HUMANS NOT BECAUSE... I SENSED DANGER...
21

...BUT BECAUSE... I WAS JEALOUS...OF THE LOVE YOU BORE... FOR THIS WOMAN OF EARTH.
LOVE--?
YES. ROM TOLD... WRAITH... HE BELIEVED TO BE... YOU.
LOVE?!
IT WAS MY... JEALOUSLY... THAT BETRAYED ME. INSTEAD OF ...ANALYZING FALSE HUMANS MYSELF... I ENCOURAGED THEM... TO FOLLOW US INTO DANGER...
...ALMOST HOPING THAT... BRANDY WOULD BE KILLED... AND I WOULD HAVE ROM...FOR MYSELF!
THESE-- THESE SPACEKNIGHTS DROP DOWN FROM THE STARS! THEY INVOLVE US IN THEIR WARS!
AND ONE OF 'EM STEALS THE HEART OF MY GIRL WHILE ANOTHER WISHES HER DEAD!
WHAT DO WE NEED 'EM FOR? ALL RIGHT, ROM ALERTED US TO THE WRAITH MENACE-- BUT WE'VE PROVED TOUGH ENOUGH TO TAKE CARE OF OURSELVES! WE DON'T NEED SPACEKNIGHTS SCREWING AROUND WITH OUR PRIVATE LIVES!
CURSE THEM!
LIFE USED TO BE SO SIMPLE!
THERE'S MORE THAN THE MOLE MAN DOWN UNDER THE EARTH! BE HERE NEXT MONTH FOR...
THE MISSING LINK!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MARVEL® COMICS GROUP
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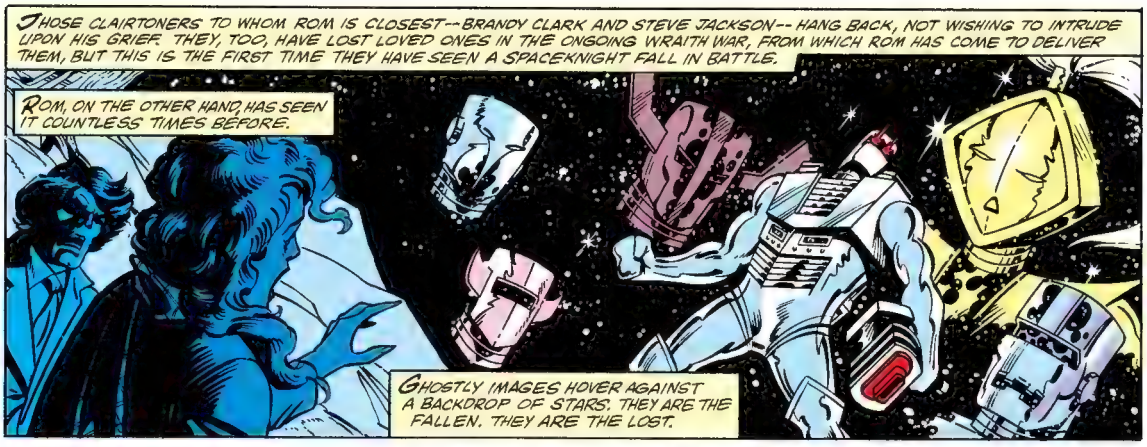
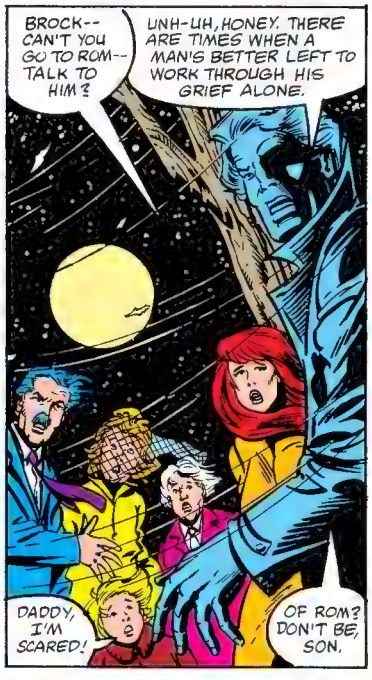
ROM
SPACEKNIGHT
DOWN IN THE MINES...

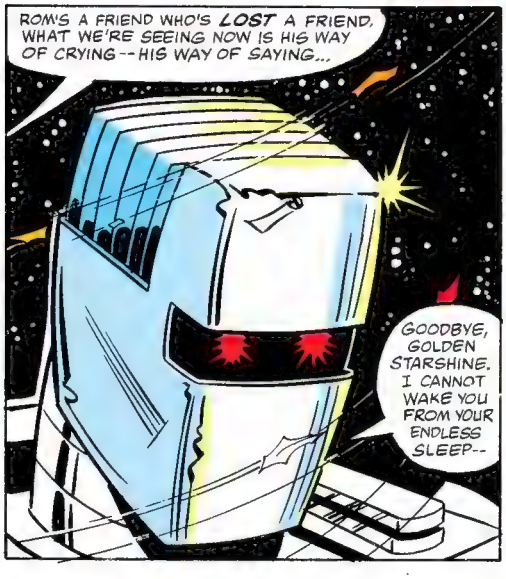
STAN LEE PRESENTS: THE GREATEST OF THE SPACEKNIGHTS--ROM!
BILL MANTLO WRITER
SAL BUSCEMA PENCILER
STONE, ESPOSITO, GIACOIA, MILGROM & MAGYAR--INKERS
PARKER, letters SEAN, colors
AL MILGROM EDITOR
JIM SHOOTER OVERSEER
IN CLAIRTON, WEST VIRGINIA, TONIGHT A SOMBER FUNERAL IS BEING HELD.
THE PALLBEARERS, PRIEST, AND ALL BUT ONE OF THE MOURNERS ARE HUMAN.
THE CORPSE WAS A SPACEKNIGHT.
STARSHINE!
ASHES TO ASHES, DUST TO DUST...
EVEN A SPACEKNIGHT CAN CRY!


THOSE CLAIRTONERS TO WHOM ROM IS CLOSEST--BRANDY CLARK AND STEVE JACKSON--HANG BACK, NOT WISHING TO INTRUDE UPON HIS GRIEF. THEY, TOO, HAVE LOST LOVED ONES IN THE ONGOING WRAITH WAR, FROM WHICH ROM HAS COME TO DELIVER THEM, BUT THIS IS THE FIRST TIME THEY HAVE SEEN A SPACEKNIGHT FALL IN BATTLE.
ROM, ON THE OTHER HAND, HAS SEEN IT COUNTLESS TIMES BEFORE.
GHOSTLY IMAGES HOVER AGAINST A BACKDROP OF STARS. THEY ARE THE FALLEN. THEY ARE THE LOST.

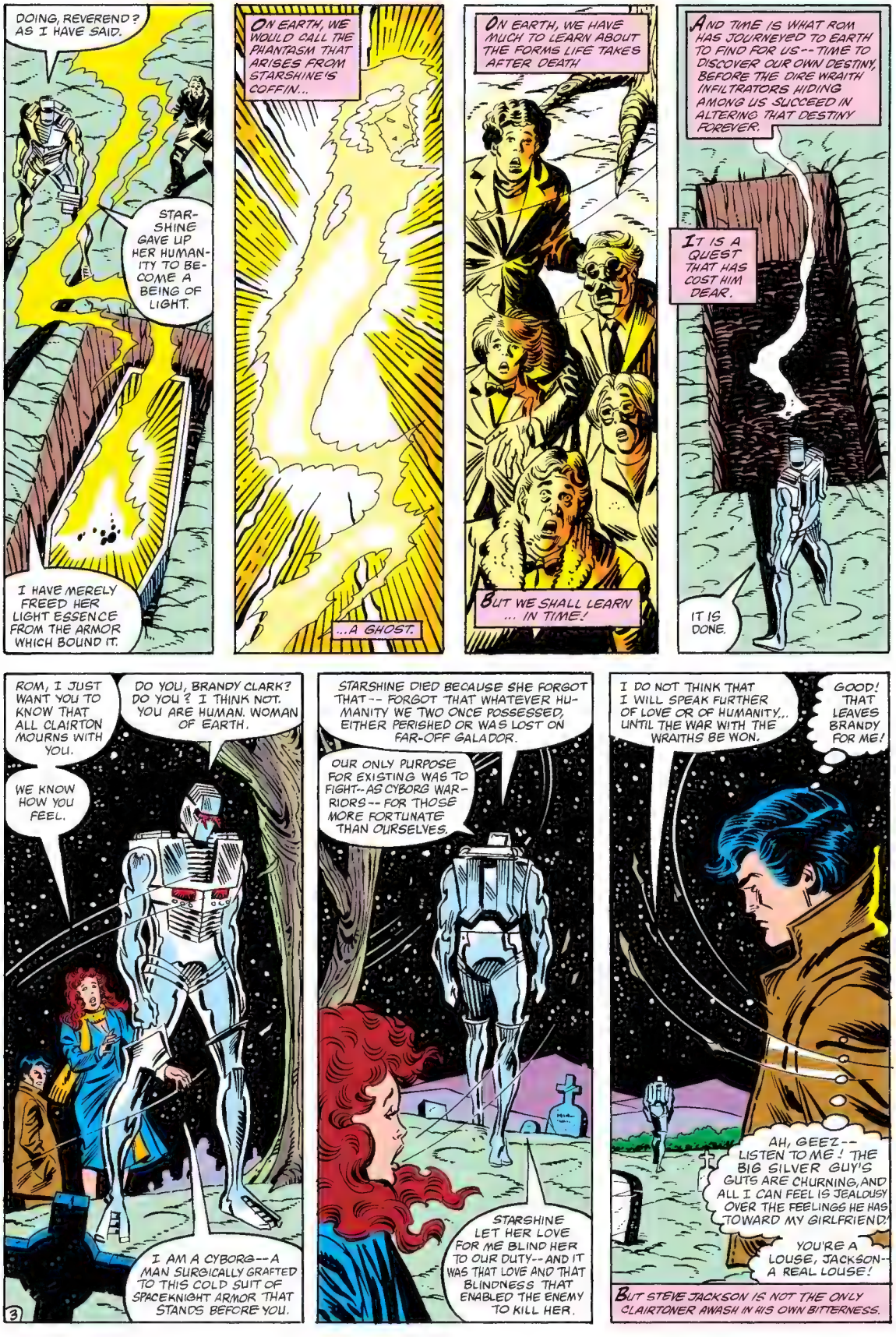
UNABLE TO RAISE THEM, AS HE WAS UNABLE TO SAVE THEM, ROM UNLEASHES HIS NEUTRALIZER INTO THE NIGHT.

IT IS BUT A GESTURE, SYMBOLIC OF THE SPACEKNIGHT'S ANGUISH, BUT IT COINCIDES WITH A CHILL WIND THAT SUDDENLY SWEEPS THE CEMETERY.

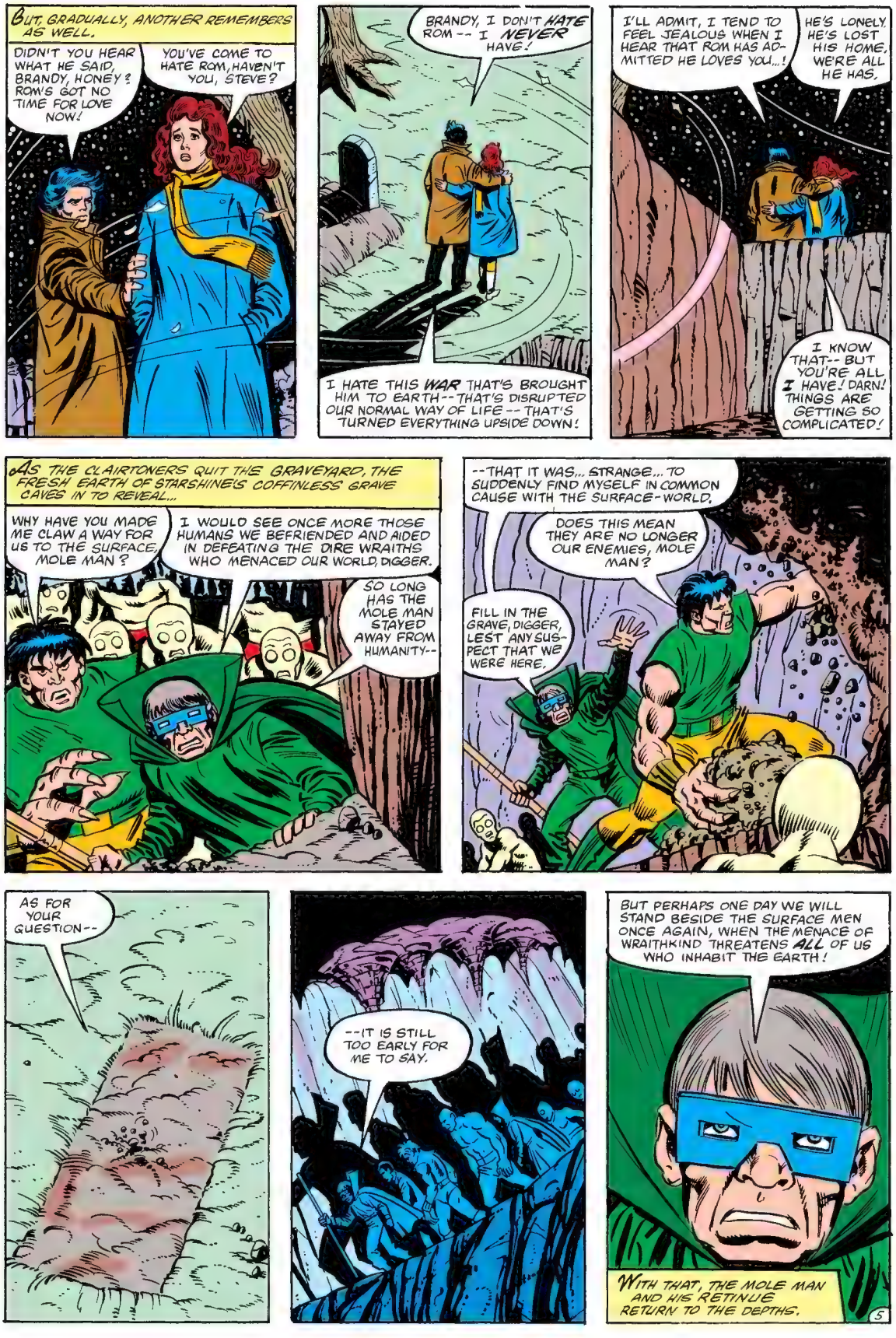

BROCK--CAN'T YOU GO TO ROM--TALK TO HIM?
UNH-UH, HONEY. THERE ARE TIMES WHEN A MAN'S BETTER LEFT TO WORK THROUGH HIS GRIEF ALONE.
DADDY, I'M SCARED!
OF ROM? DON'T BE, SON.

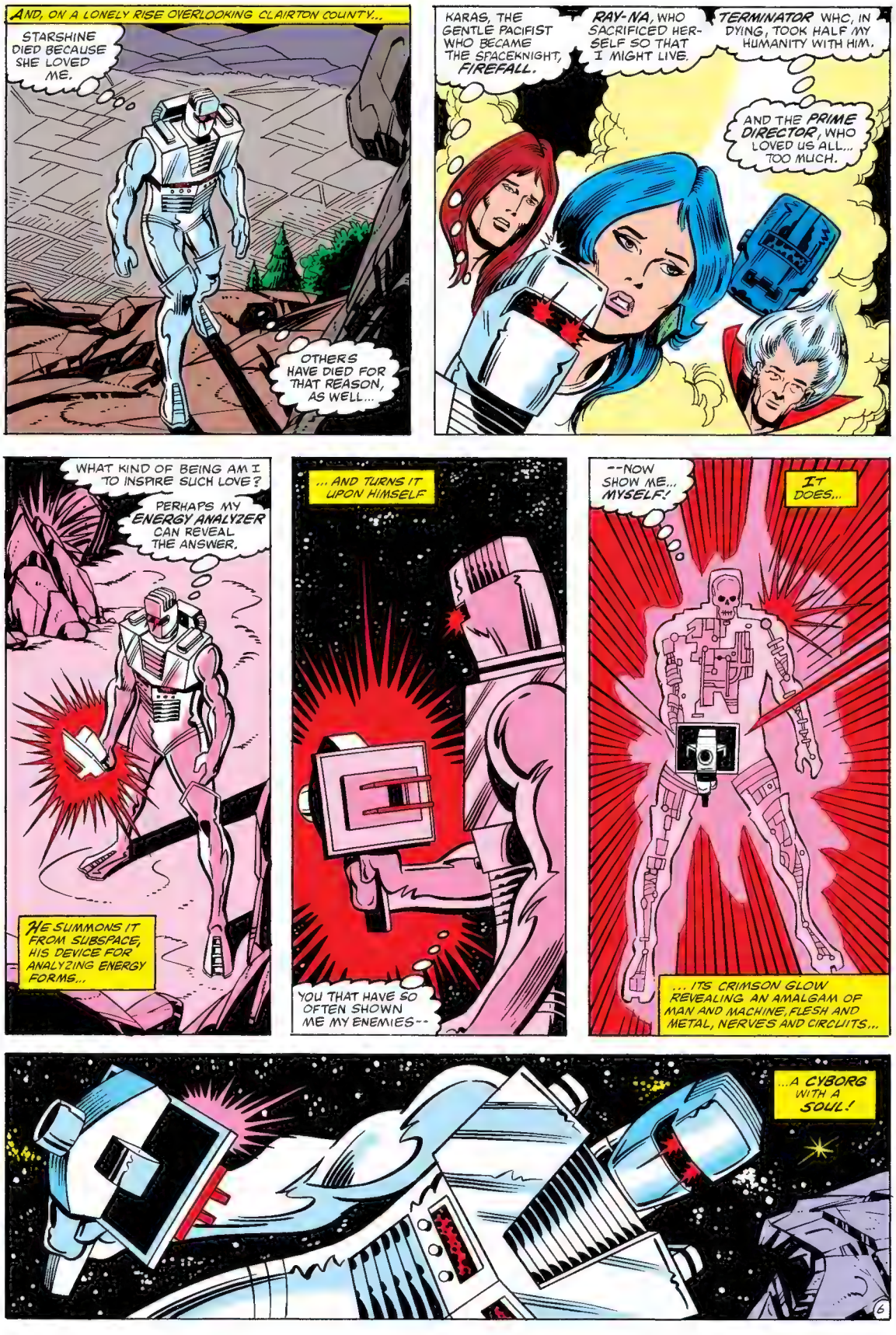

ROM'S A FRIEND WHO'S LOST A FRIEND. WHAT WE'RE SEEING NOW IS HIS WAY OF CRYING--HIS WAY OF SAYING...
GOODBYE, GOLDEN STARSHINE. I CANNOT WAKE YOU FROM YOUR ENDLESS SLEEP--

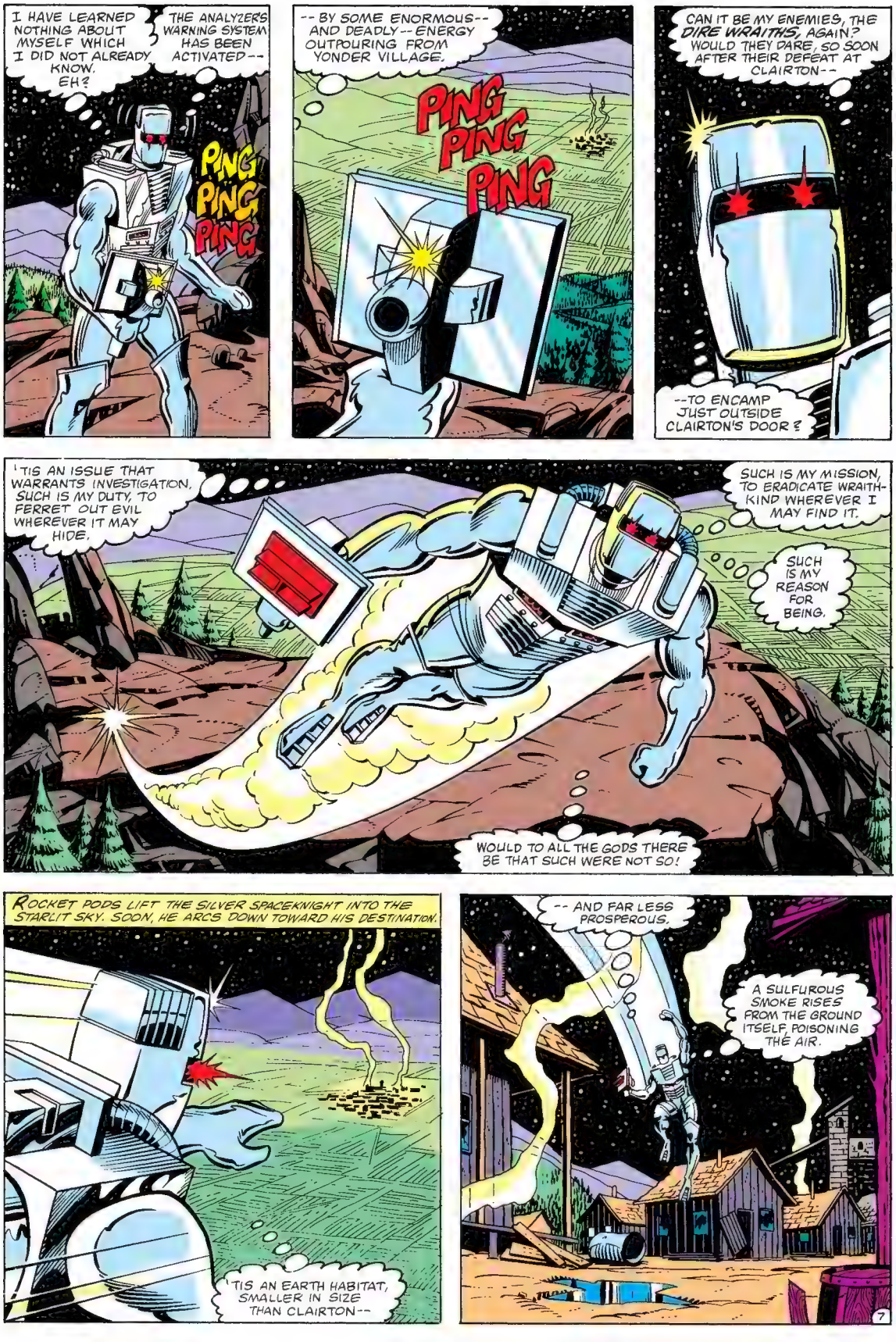
--BUT I CAN RELEASE THOSE ENERGIES ENCASED WITHIN YOUR SPACEKNIGHT ARMOR--
--SO THAT YOUR ETERNAL SOUL MAY SOAR WITH THE ANGELS.
ROM, WHAT ARE YOU--?
2

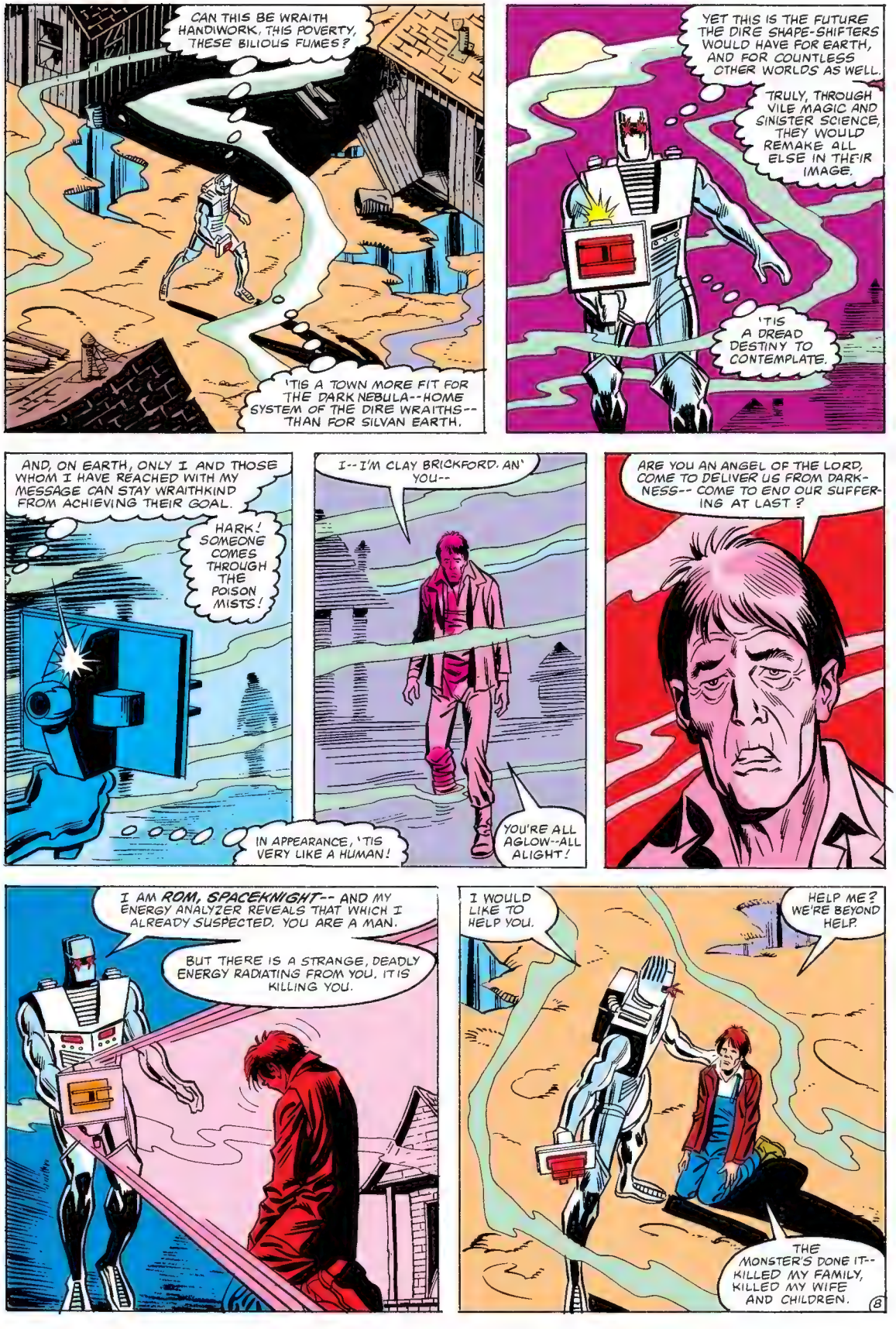

DOING, REVEREND? AS I HAVE SAID.
STAR-SHINE GAVE UP HER HUMAN-ITY TO BE-COME A BEING OF LIGHT.
I HAVE MERELY FREED HER LIGHT ESSENCE FROM THE ARMOR WHICH BOUND IT.
ON EARTH, WE WOULD CALL THE PHANTASM THAT ARISES FROM STARSHINE'S COFFIN...
...A GHOST.
ON EARTH, WE HAVE MUCH TO LEARN ABOUT THE FORMS LIFE TAKES AFTER DEATH
BUT WE SHALL LEARN ... IN TIME!
AND TIME IS WHAT ROM HAS JOURNEYED TO EARTH TO FIND FOR US--TIME TO DISCOVER OUR OWN DESTINY, BEFORE THE DIRE WRAITH INFILTRATORS HIDING AMONG US SUCCEED IN ALTERING THAT DESTINY FOREVER.
IT IS A QUEST THAT HAS COST HIM DEAR.
IT IS DONE.
ROM, I JUST WANT YOU TO KNOW THAT ALL CLAIRTON MOURNS WITH YOU.
WE KNOW HOW YOU FEEL.
DO YOU, BRANDY CLARK? DO YOU? I THINK NOT. YOU ARE HUMAN. WOMAN OF EARTH.
I AM A CYBORG--A MAN SURGICALLY GRAFTED TO THIS COLD SUIT OF SPACEKNIGHT ARMOR THAT STANDS BEFORE YOU.
3
STARSHINE DIED BECAUSE SHE FORGOT THAT-- FORGOT THAT WHATEVER HU-MANITY WE TWO ONCE POSSESSED, EITHER PERISHED OR WAS LOST ON FAR-OFF GALADOR.
OUR ONLY PURPOSE FOR EXISTING WAS TO FIGHT--AS CYBORG WAR-RIORS-- FOR THOSE MORE FORTUNATE THAN OURSELVES.
STARSHINE LET HER LOVE FOR ME BLIND HER TO OUR DUTY--AND IT WAS THAT LOVE AND THAT BLINDNESS THAT ENABLED THE ENEMY TO KILL HER.
I DO NOT THINK THAT I WILL SPEAK FURTHER OF LOVE OR OF HUMANITY,.. UNTIL THE WAR WITH THE WRAITHS BE WON.
GOOD! THAT LEAVES BRANDY FOR ME!
AH, GEEZ-- LISTEN TO ME! THE BIG SILVER GUY'S GUTS ARE CHURNING, AND ALL I CAN FEEL IS JEALOUSY OVER THE FEELINGS HE HAS TOWARD MY GIRLFRIEND!
YOU'RE A LOUSE, JACKSON-- A REAL LOUSE!
BUT STEVE JACKSON IS NOT THE ONLY CLAIRTONER AWASH IN HIS OWN BITTERNESS.

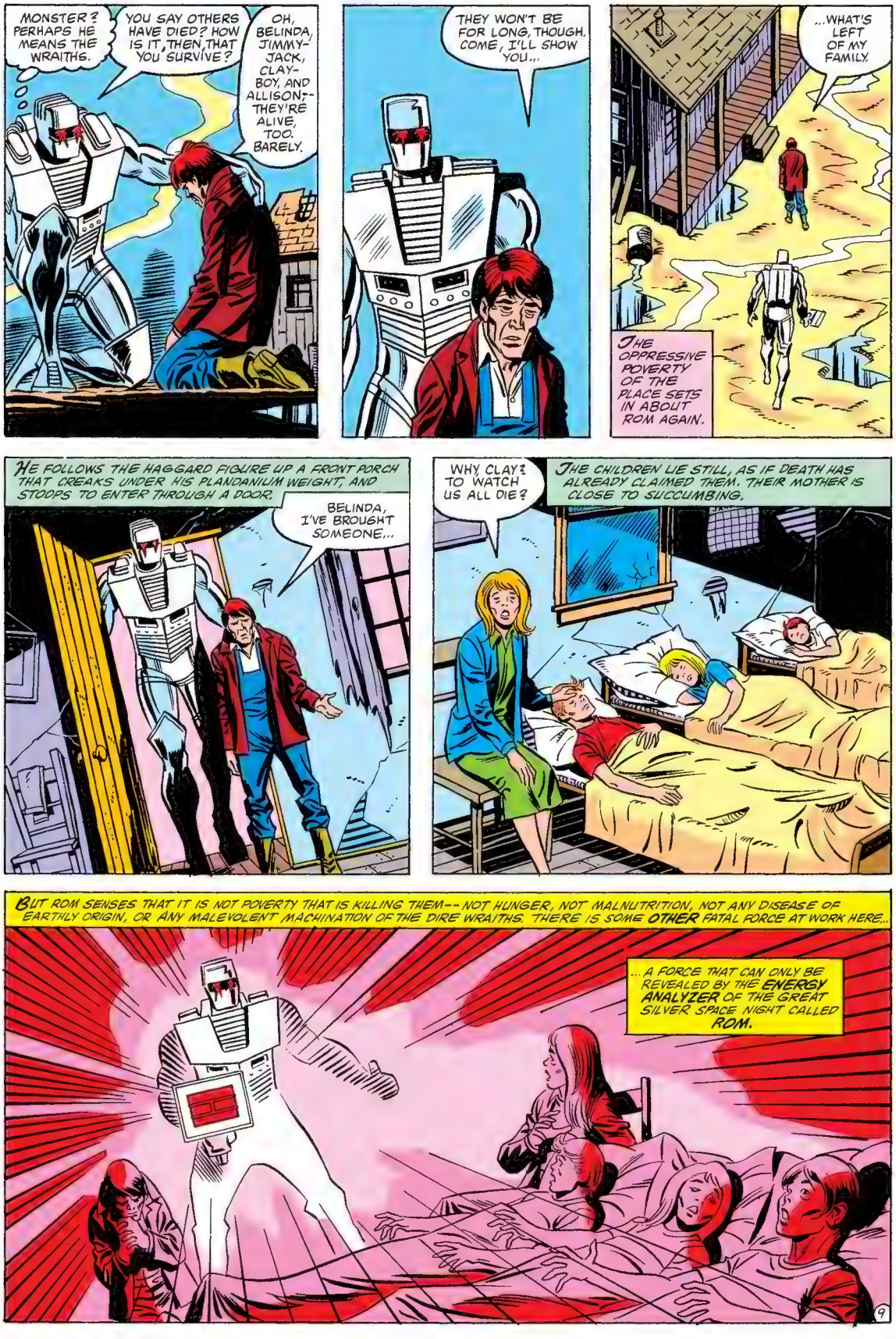
SINCE THE START OF THE SLOW-PROCESSION TO THE CEMETERY, BROCK JONES, TOO, HAS ENGAGED IN SOME RATHER UNHERO-WORTHY SELF-RECRIMINATION.
SOME LOUSY SUPER HERO I AM! ROM LEAVES ME IN CHARGE OF CLAIRTON WHILE HE HEADS HOME TO GALADOR, AND WHAT DOES THE TORPEDO DO?
FUMBLE THE BALL, THAT'S WHAT!
BROCK JONES, YOU KNOW THERE WAS NOTHING YOU--OR ANYONE--COULD DO!
LORRY'S RIGHT, BROCK! YOU MAY HAVE A ROCKET SUIT THAT MAKES YOU A MEAN MAN IN A SKIRMISH, BUT NEITHER YOU, NOR ANYONE ELSE IN CLAIRTON, HAS GOT WHAT IT TAKES TO PENETRATE A DIRE WRAITH DISGUISE!
"HECK, THEY CAUGHT THE WHOLE TOWN FLATFOOTED WITH THAT ZOMBIEIZING WRAITH FOG OF THEIRS!
"THEY STUCK US ALL UNDERGROUND, FIGURING TO LET US ROT, BUT WE TURNED THE TABLES ON THEM--
"--DRAGGING OUR WOULD-BE DOUBLES DOWN TO UTTER DEFEAT WITH THE HELP OF THE MOLE MAN AND HIS SUBTERRANEANS!
"EVEN THEN, IT MIGHT'VE GONE THE OTHER WAY WITHOUT YOU, BROCK!"
LISTEN, A BUNCH OF US DOWN AT THE LAB THINK WE CAN MODIFY YOUR TORPEDO COSTUME'S VISOR SO THAT YOU CAN SEE THE WRAITHS!
IF--IF YOU COULD DO THAT, I'D TAKE ON THE WHOLE BUNCH OF THEM!
THAT'S MY DAD!
HEY, WHILE YOU'RE AT IT, WHY DON'T YOU TRY TO COME UP WITH ENERGY ANALYZERS FOR THE REST OF US?
YEAH, THAT WAY WE WON'T ALWAYS HAVE TO RELY ON ROM! WE'D BE ABLE TO GUARD AGAINST THE WRAITHS ON OUR OWN!
EXUBERANCE AND A SUDDEN SELF-ASSUREDNESS SWEEPS THOSE AMASSED ON THE WIND-SWEPT HILL, IN THE EXCITEMENT, ONLY ONE THERE REMEMBERS...
ROM?

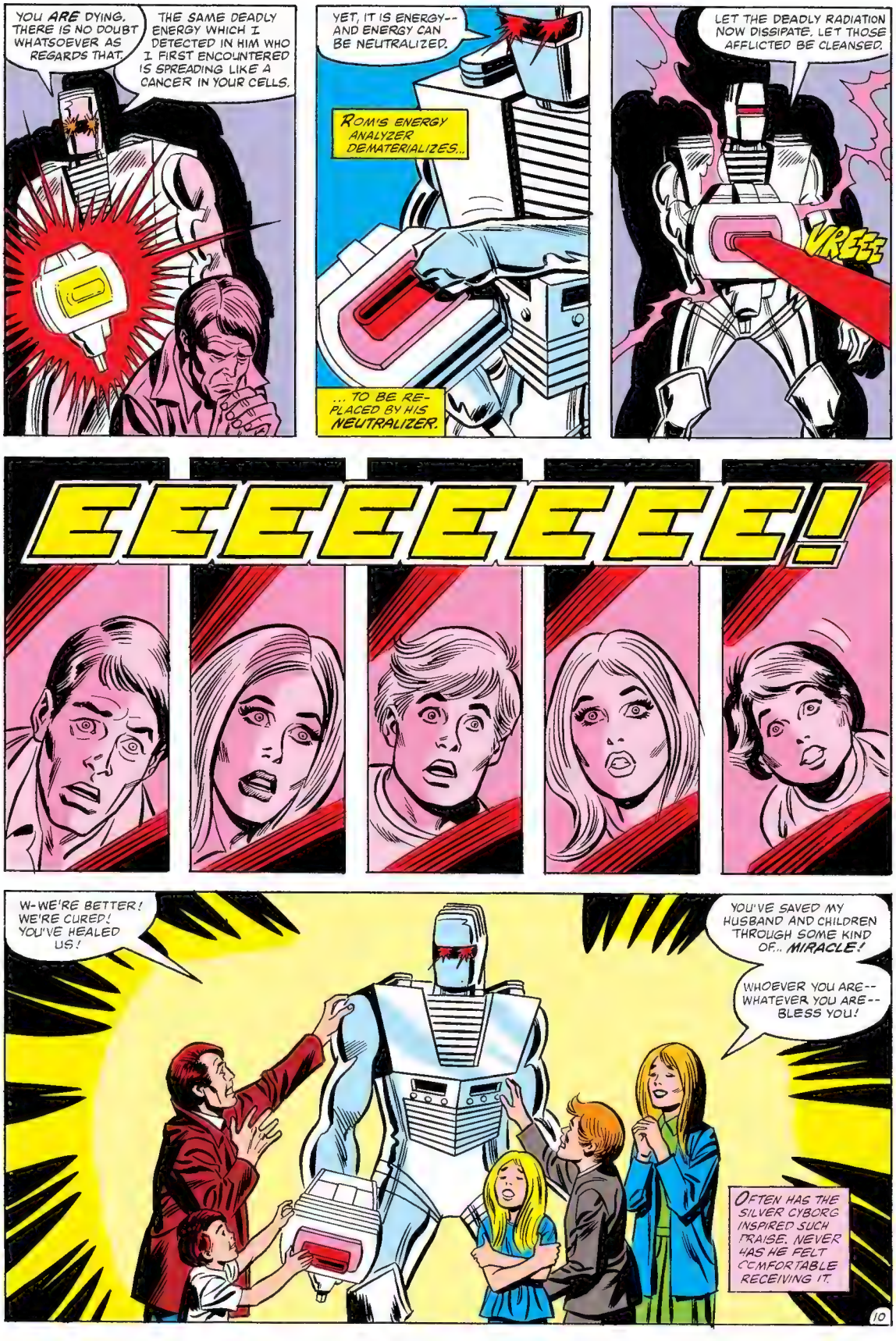

BUT, GRADUALLY, ANOTHER REMEMBERS AS WELL.
DIDN'T YOU HEAR WHAT HE SAID, BRANDY, HONEY? ROM'S GOT NO TIME FOR LOVE NOW!
YOU'VE COME TO HATE ROM, HAVEN'T YOU, STEVE?
BRANDY, I DON'T HATE ROM -- I NEVER HAVE!
I HATE THIS WAR THAT'S BROUGHT HIM TO EARTH -- THAT'S DISRUPTED OUR NORMAL WAY OF LIFE -- THAT'S TURNED EVERYTHING UPSIDE DOWN!
I'LL ADMIT, I TEND TO FEEL JEALOUS WHEN I HEAR THAT ROM HAS ADMITTED HE LOVES YOU...!
HE'S LONELY, HE'S LOST HIS HOME, WE'RE ALL HE HAS.
I KNOW THAT -- BUT YOU'RE ALL I HAVE! DARN! THINGS ARE GETTING SO COMPLICATED!
AS THE CLAIRTONERS QUIT THE GRAVEYARD, THE FRESH EARTH OF STARSHINE'S COFFINLESS GRAVE CAVES IN TO REVEAL...
WHY HAVE YOU MADE ME CLAW A WAY FOR US TO THE SURFACE, MOLE MAN?
I WOULD SEE ONCE MORE THOSE HUMANS WE BEFRIENDED AND AIDED IN DEFEATING THE DIRE WRAITHS WHO MENACED OUR WORLD, DIGGER.
SO LONG HAS THE MOLE MAN STAYED AWAY FROM HUMANITY--
--THAT IT WAS... STRANGE... TO SUDDENLY FIND MYSELF IN COMMON CAUSE WITH THE SURFACE-WORLD.
DOES THIS MEAN THEY ARE NO LONGER OUR ENEMIES, MOLE MAN?
FILL IN THE GRAVE, DIGGER, LEST ANY SUSPECT THAT WE WERE HERE.
AS FOR YOUR QUESTION--
--IT IS STILL TOO EARLY FOR ME TO SAY.
BUT PERHAPS ONE DAY WE WILL STAND BESIDE THE SURFACE MEN ONCE AGAIN, WHEN THE MENACE OF WRAITHKIND THREATENS ALL OF US WHO INHABIT THE EARTH!
WITH THAT, THE MOLE MAN AND HIS RETINUE RETURN TO THE DEPTHS.
5

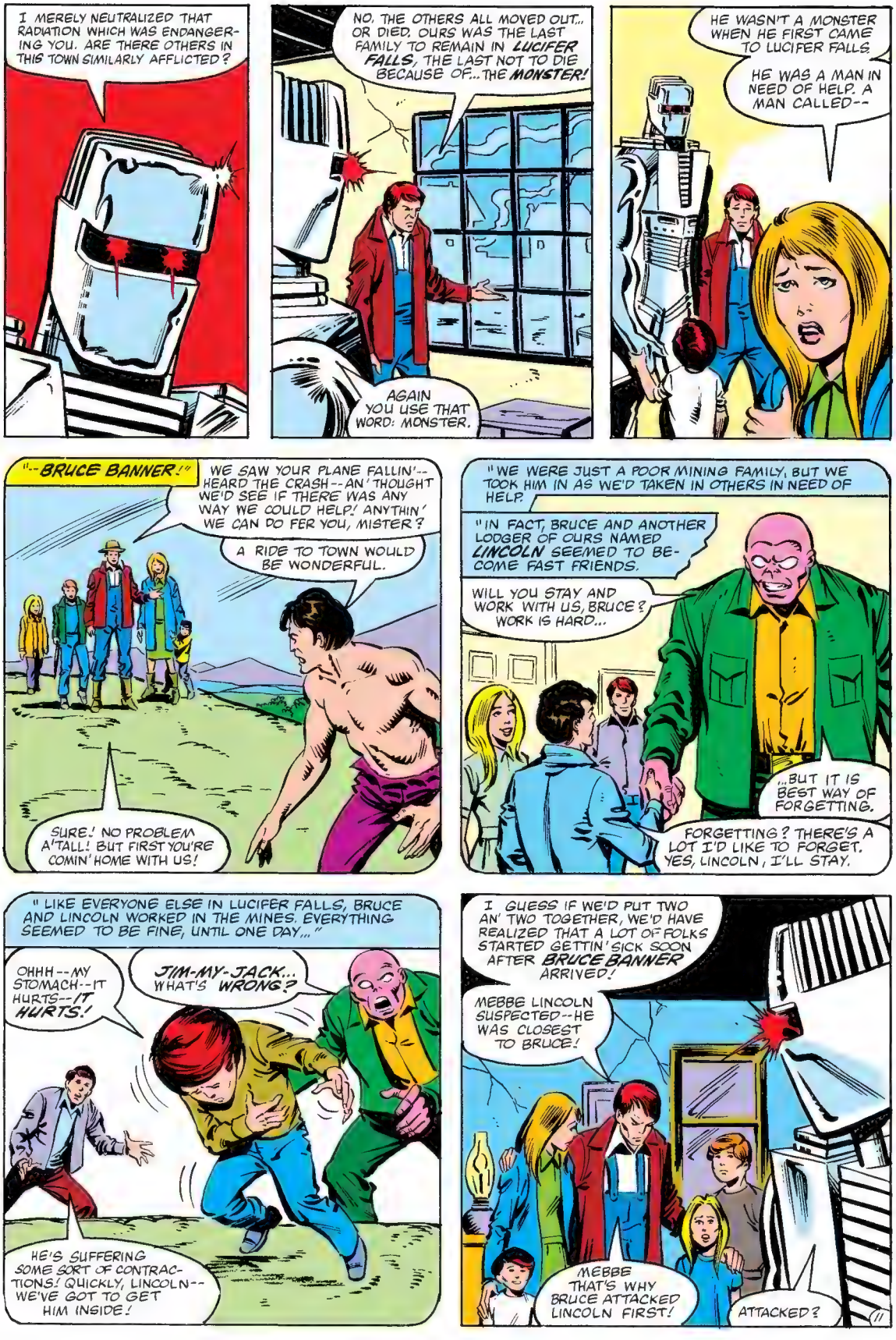

AND, ON A LONELY RISE OVERLOOKING CLAIRTON COUNTY...
STARSHINE DIED BECAUSE SHE LOVED ME.
OTHERS HAVE DIED FOR THAT REASON, AS WELL...
KARAS, THE GENTLE PACIFIST WHO BECAME THE SPACEKNIGHT, FIREFALL.
RAY-NA, WHO SACRIFICED HERSELF SO THAT I MIGHT LIVE.
TERMINATOR WHO, IN DYING, TOOK HALF MY HUMANITY WITH HIM.
AND THE PRIME DIRECTOR, WHO LOVED US ALL... TOO MUCH.
WHAT KIND OF BEING AM I TO INSPIRE SUCH LOVE?
PERHAPS MY ENERGY ANALYZER CAN REVEAL THE ANSWER.
HE SUMMONS IT FROM SUBSPACE, HIS DEVICE FOR ANALYZING ENERGY FORMS...
... AND TURNS IT UPON HIMSELF
YOU THAT HAVE SO OFTEN SHOWN ME MY ENEMIES--
--NOW SHOW ME... MYSELF!
IT DOES...
... ITS CRIMSON GLOW REVEALING AN AMALGAM OF MAN AND MACHINE, FLESH AND METAL, NERVES AND CIRCUITS...
...A CYBORG WITH A SOUL!
6

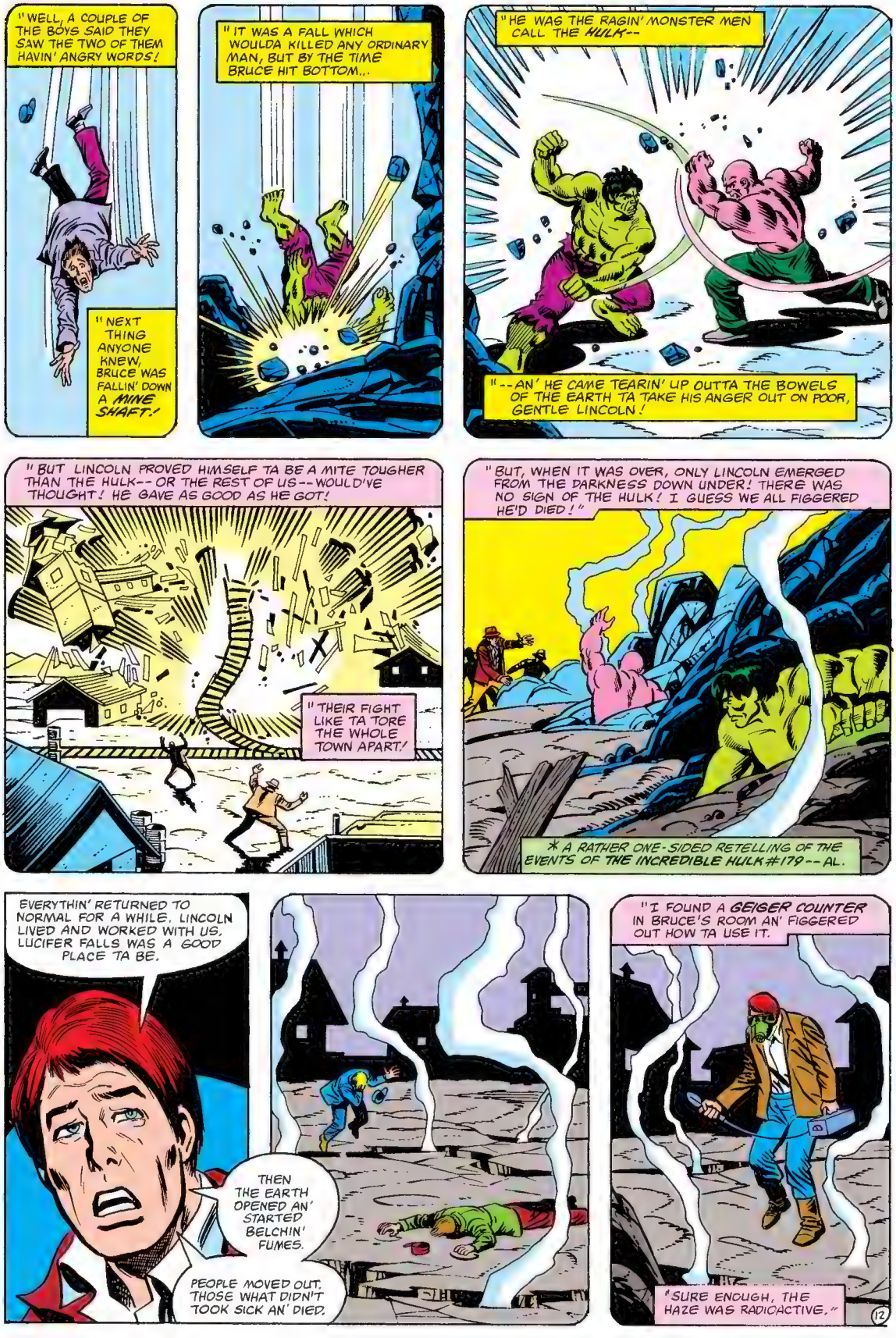

I HAVE LEARNED NOTHING ABOUT MYSELF WHICH I DID NOT ALREADY KNOW. EH?
THE ANALYZERS WARNING SYSTEM HAS BEEN ACTIVATED--
PING PING PING
-- BY SOME ENORMOUS-- AND DEADLY-- ENERGY OUTPOURING FROM YONDER VILLAGE.
PING PING PING
CAN IT BE MY ENEMIES, THE DIRE WRAITHS, AGAIN? WOULD THEY DARE, SO SOON AFTER THEIR DEFEAT AT CLAIRTON--
--TO ENCAMP JUST OUTSIDE CLAIRTON'S DOOR?
'TIS AN ISSUE THAT WARRANTS INVESTIGATION. SUCH IS MY DUTY, TO FERRET OUT EVIL WHEREVER IT MAY HIDE.
SUCH IS MY MISSION, TO ERADICATE WRAITH-KIND WHEREVER I MAY FIND IT.
SUCH IS MY REASON FOR BEING.
WOULD TO ALL THE GODS THERE BE THAT SUCH WERE NOT SO!
ROCKET PODS LIFT THE SILVER SPACEKNIGHT INTO THE STARLIT SKY. SOON, HE ARCS DOWN TOWARD HIS DESTINATION.
'TIS AN EARTH HABITAT, SMALLER IN SIZE THAN CLAIRTON--
-- AND FAR LESS PROSPEROUS.
A SULFUROUS SMOKE RISES FROM THE GROUND ITSELF, POISONING THE AIR.
7


CAN THIS BE WRAITH HANDIWORK, THIS POVERTY, THESE BILIOUS FUMES?
'TIS A TOWN MORE FIT FOR THE DARK NEBULA--HOME SYSTEM OF THE DIRE WRAITHS--THAN FOR SILVAN EARTH.
YET THIS IS THE FUTURE THE DIRE SHAPE-SHIFTERS WOULD HAVE FOR EARTH, AND FOR COUNTLESS OTHER WORLDS AS WELL.
TRULY, THROUGH VILE MAGIC AND SINISTER SCIENCE, THEY WOULD REMAKE ALL ELSE IN THEIR IMAGE.
'TIS A DREAD DESTINY TO CONTEMPLATE.
AND, ON EARTH, ONLY I AND THOSE WHOM I HAVE REACHED WITH MY MESSAGE CAN STAY WRAITHKIND FROM ACHIEVING THEIR GOAL.
HARK! SOMEONE COMES THROUGH THE POISON MISTS!
IN APPEARANCE, 'TIS VERY LIKE A HUMAN!
I--I'M CLAY BRICKFORD. AN' YOU--
YOU'RE ALL AGLOW--ALL ALIGHT!
ARE YOU AN ANGEL OF THE LORD, COME TO DELIVER US FROM DARKNESS-- COME TO END OUR SUFFERING AT LAST?
I AM ROM, SPACEKNIGHT-- AND MY ENERGY ANALYZER REVEALS THAT WHICH I ALREADY SUSPECTED. YOU ARE A MAN.
BUT THERE IS A STRANGE, DEADLY ENERGY RADIATING FROM YOU. IT IS KILLING YOU.
I WOULD LIKE TO HELP YOU.
HELP ME? WE'RE BEYOND HELP.
THE MONSTER'S DONE IT-- KILLED MY FAMILY, KILLED MY WIFE AND CHILDREN.
8

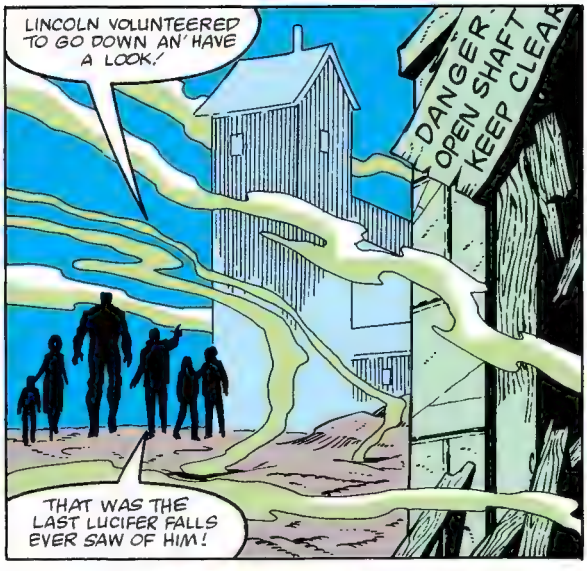

MONSTER? PERHAPS HE MEANS THE WRAITHS.
YOU SAY OTHERS HAVE DIED? HOW IS IT, THEN, THAT YOU SURVIVE?
OH, BELINDA, JIMMY-JACK, CLAY-BOY, AND ALLISON?-- THEY'RE ALIVE, TOO. BARELY.
THEY WON'T BE FOR LONG, THOUGH. COME, I'LL SHOW YOU...
...WHAT'S LEFT OF MY FAMILY.
THE OPPRESSIVE POVERTY OF THE PLACE SETS IN ABOUT ROM AGAIN.
HE FOLLOWS THE HAGGARD FIGURE UP A FRONT PORCH THAT CREAKS UNDER HIS PLANDANIUM WEIGHT, AND STOOPS TO ENTER THROUGH A DOOR.
BELINDA, I'VE BROUGHT SOMEONE...
WHY, CLAY? TO WATCH US ALL DIE?
THE CHILDREN LIE STILL, AS IF DEATH HAS ALREADY CLAIMED THEM. THEIR MOTHER IS CLOSE TO SUCCUMBING.
BUT ROM SENSES THAT IT IS NOT POVERTY THAT IS KILLING THEM-- NOT HUNGER, NOT MALNUTRITION, NOT ANY DISEASE OF EARTHLY ORIGIN, OR ANY MALEVOLENT MACHINATION OF THE DIRE WRAITHS. THERE IS SOME OTHER FATAL FORCE AT WORK HERE...
...A FORCE THAT CAN ONLY BE REVEALED BY THE ENERGY ANALYZER OF THE GREAT SILVER SPACE KNIGHT CALLED ROM.
9


YOU ARE DYING. THERE IS NO DOUBT WHATSOEVER AS REGARDS THAT.
THE SAME DEADLY ENERGY WHICH I DETECTED IN HIM WHO I FIRST ENCOUNTERED IS SPREADING LIKE A CANCER IN YOUR CELLS.
YET, IT IS ENERGY-- AND ENERGY CAN BE NEUTRALIZED.
ROM'S ENERGY ANALYZER DEMATERIALIZES...
... TO BE RE-PLACED BY HIS NEUTRALIZER.
LET THE DEADLY RADIATION NOW DISSIPATE. LET THOSE AFFLICTED BE CLEANSED.
VREEE
EEEEEEEE!
W-WE'RE BETTER! WE'RE CURED! YOU'VE HEALED US!
YOU'VE SAVED MY HUSBAND AND CHILDREN THROUGH SOME KIND OF... MIRACLE!
WHOEVER YOU ARE-- WHATEVER YOU ARE-- BLESS YOU!
OFTEN HAS THE SILVER CYBORG INSPIRED SUCH PRAISE. NEVER HAS HE FELT COMFORTABLE RECEIVING IT.
10

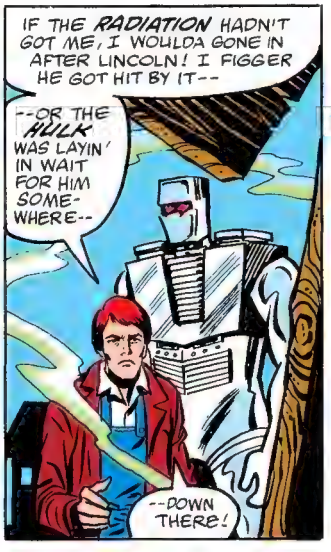

I MERELY NEUTRALIZED THAT RADIATION WHICH WAS ENDANGERING YOU. ARE THERE OTHERS IN THIS TOWN SIMILARLY AFFLICTED?
NO. THE OTHERS ALL MOVED OUT... OR DIED. OURS WAS THE LAST FAMILY TO REMAIN IN LUCIFER FALLS, THE LAST NOT TO DIE BECAUSE OF... THE MONSTER!
AGAIN YOU USE THAT WORD: MONSTER.
HE WASN'T A MONSTER WHEN HE FIRST CAME TO LUCIFER FALLS.
HE WAS A MAN IN NEED OF HELP. A MAN CALLED--
"--BRUCE BANNER!" WE SAW YOUR PLANE FALLIN'-- HEARD THE CRASH--AN' THOUGHT WE'D SEE IF THERE WAS ANY WAY WE COULD HELP! ANYTHIN' WE CAN DO FER YOU, MISTER?
A RIDE TO TOWN WOULD BE WONDERFUL.
SURE! NO PROBLEM A'TALL! BUT FIRST YOU'RE COMIN' HOME WITH US!
"WE WERE JUST A POOR MINING FAMILY, BUT WE TOOK HIM IN AS WE'D TAKEN IN OTHERS IN NEED OF HELP.
"IN FACT, BRUCE AND ANOTHER LODGER OF OURS NAMED LINCOLN SEEMED TO BECOME FAST FRIENDS.
WILL YOU STAY AND WORK WITH US, BRUCE? WORK IS HARD...
...BUT IT IS BEST WAY OF FORGETTING.
FORGETTING? THERE'S A LOT I'D LIKE TO FORGET. YES, LINCOLN, I'LL STAY.
"LIKE EVERYONE ELSE IN LUCIFER FALLS, BRUCE AND LINCOLN WORKED IN THE MINES. EVERYTHING SEEMED TO BE FINE, UNTIL ONE DAY..."
OHHH--MY STOMACH--IT HURTS--IT HURTS!
JIM-MY-JACK... WHAT'S WRONG?
HE'S SUFFERING SOME SORT OF CONTRACTIONS! QUICKLY, LINCOLN-- WE'VE GOT TO GET HIM INSIDE!
I GUESS IF WE'D PUT TWO AN' TWO TOGETHER, WE'D HAVE REALIZED THAT A LOT OF FOLKS STARTED GETTIN' SICK SOON AFTER BRUCE BANNER ARRIVED!
MEBBE LINCOLN SUSPECTED--HE WAS CLOSEST TO BRUCE!
MEBBE THAT'S WHY BRUCE ATTACKED LINCOLN FIRST!
ATTACKED?


"WELL, A COUPLE OF THE BOYS SAID THEY SAW THE TWO OF THEM HAVIN' ANGRY WORDS!
"NEXT THING ANYONE KNEW, BRUCE WAS FALLIN' DOWN A MINE SHAFT!"
"IT WAS A FALL WHICH WOULDA KILLED ANY ORDINARY MAN, BUT BY THE TIME BRUCE HIT BOTTOM...
"HE WAS THE RAGIN' MONSTER MEN CALL THE HULK--
"--AN' HE CAME TEARIN' UP OUTTA THE BOWELS OF THE EARTH TA TAKE HIS ANGER OUT ON POOR, GENTLE LINCOLN!
"BUT LINCOLN PROVED HIMSELF TA BE A MITE TOUGHER THAN THE HULK-- OR THE REST OF US--WOULD'VE THOUGHT! HE GAVE AS GOOD AS HE GOT!
"THEIR FIGHT LIKE TA TORE THE WHOLE TOWN APART!
"BUT, WHEN IT WAS OVER, ONLY LINCOLN EMERGED FROM THE DARKNESS DOWN UNDER! THERE WAS NO SIGN OF THE HULK! I GUESS WE ALL FIGGERED HE'D DIED!"
* A RATHER ONE-SIDED RETELLING OF THE EVENTS OF THE INCREDIBLE HULK #179--AL.
EVERYTHIN' RETURNED TO NORMAL FOR A WHILE. LINCOLN LIVED AND WORKED WITH US, LUCIFER FALLS WAS A GOOD PLACE TA BE.
THEN THE EARTH OPENED AN' STARTED BELCHIN' FUMES.
PEOPLE MOVED OUT. THOSE WHAT DIDN'T TOOK SICK AN' DIED.
"I FOUND A GEIGER COUNTER IN BRUCE'S ROOM AN' FIGGERED OUT HOW TA USE IT.
"SURE ENOUGH, THE HAZE WAS RADIOACTIVE."
12

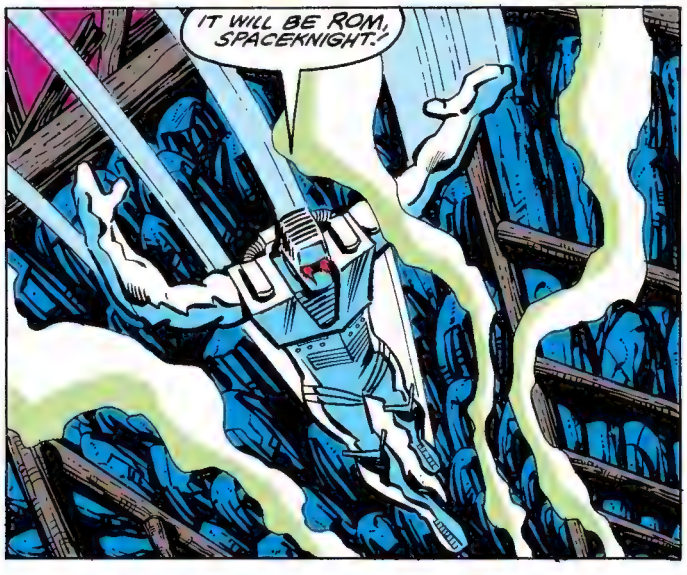
THAT'S WHAT I MEAN 'BOUT THINGS ADDIN' UP. SOMEBODY REMEMBERED HEARIN' HOW IT WAS SOME KINDA RADIATION THAT TURNED BRUCE BANNER INTO THE HULK!
WE FIGGERED IT WAS THAT RADIATION THAT STARTED MAKIN' FOLKS SICK AFTER BRUCE COME TO TOWN -- AN' ENDED AFTER THE HULK WAS TRAPPED IN THE MINES!
WHEN THE SICKNESS STARTED UP AGAIN, WE KNEW IT HADDA BE COMIN' FROM THE HULK -- OR HIS ROTTING CORPSE BURIED UNDERGROUND!

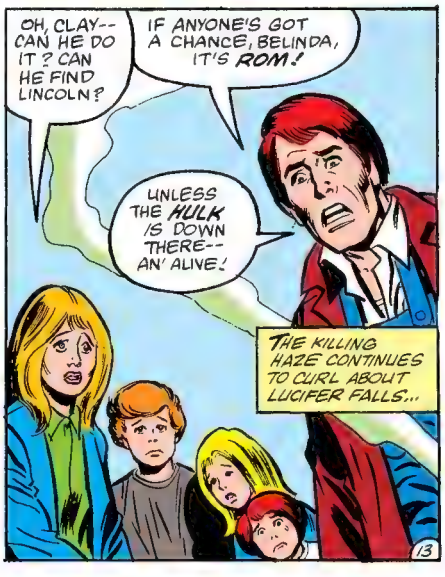

LINCOLN VOLUNTEERED TO GO DOWN AN' HAVE A LOOK.
DANGER OPEN SHAFT KEEP CLEAR
THAT WAS THE LAST LUCIFER FALLS EVER SAW OF HIM!

EVERYONE ELSE LEFT ALIVE MOVED OUT THEN! BUT WE BRICKFORDS WERE LINCOLN'S CLOSEST FRIENDS!
WE COULDN'T LEAVE WITHOUT HIM! NOT WITHOUT KNOWING...

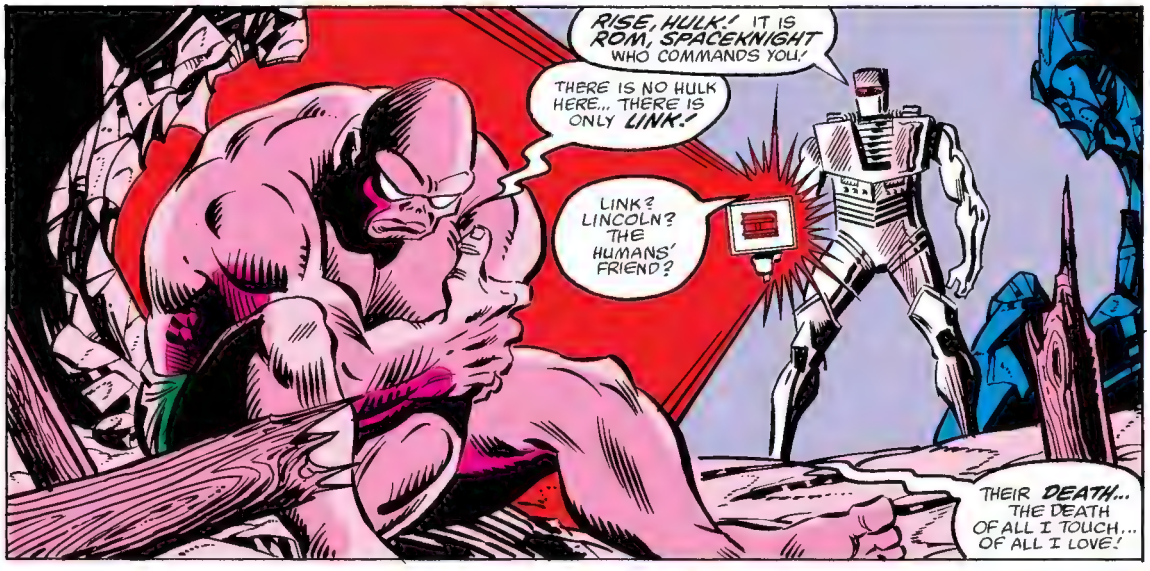

IF THE RADIATION HADN'T GOT ME, I WOULDA GONE IN AFTER LINCOLN! I FIGGER HE GOT HIT BY IT--
--OR THE HULK WAS LAYIN' IN WAIT FOR HIM SOMEWHERE--
--DOWN THERE!

STAY ON THE SURFACE WITH YOUR FAMILY, MAN OF EARTH. IF ANYONE IS TO SEEK YOUR MISSING FRIEND--


IT WILL BE ROM, SPACEKNIGHT!


OH, CLAY-- CAN HE DO IT? CAN HE FIND LINCOLN?
IF ANYONE'S GOT A CHANCE, BELINDA, IT'S ROM!
UNLESS THE HULK IS DOWN THERE-- AN' ALIVE!
THE KILLING HAZE CONTINUES TO CURL ABOUT LUCIFER FALLS...
13

...AS ROM DROPS LIKE A SHIMMERING SILVER STONE DOWN INTO STYGIAN DARKNESS.
THE AIR IS FETID IN HERE-- HOT-- HEAVY WITH THE STENCH OF DEATH.
MY HUMAN CELLS GRAFTED TO THIS SPACEKNIGHT ARMOR REQUIRE OXYGEN-- WHICH WILL BE SUPPLIED THEM BY MY BUILT-IN RESPIRATOR.
KLIK
I HAD BEGUN TO SUSPECT THE SHAFT HAD NO BOTTOM--
--BUT I HAVE REACHED IT AT LAST.
IT IS BLACK AS THE DARK NEBULA DOWN HERE!
MY CYBORG VISION, HOWEVER, WAS DESIGNED TO COMPENSATE FOR THE DARK OF DARKEST SPACE. STILL, IT WILL BE MY ENERGY ANALYZER THAT LEADS ME TO THE SOURCE OF THE RADIATION.
PING PING PING
GODS OF GALADOR, THE RADIATION MY ANALYZER DETECTS FAR EXCEEDS ANY I HAVE EVER ENCOUNTERED.
CAN IT REALLY BE THAT THIS BEING-- THIS HULK, AS THE BRICKFORDS CALLED IT-- COULD EMIT SUCH ENERGIES... AND LIVE?!
THERE! A FIGURE CROUCHED IN DARKNESS! HE IS THE SOURCE OF THE RADIATION WHICH IS DEVASTATING LUCIFER FALLS!
14


RISE, HULK! IT IS ROM, SPACEKNIGHT WHO COMMANDS YOU!
THERE IS NO HULK HERE... THERE IS ONLY LINK!
LINK? LINCOLN? THE HUMANS' FRIEND?
THEIR DEATH... THE DEATH OF ALL I TOUCH... OF ALL I LOVE!

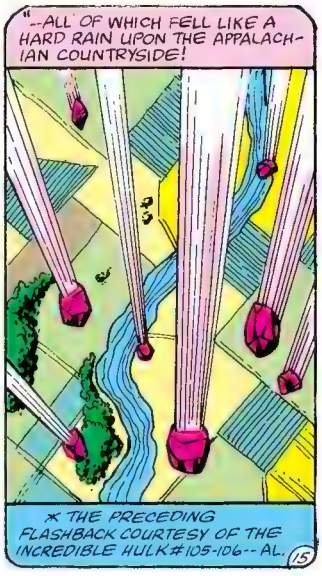
MY FATHER WAS AN ATOM... MY MOTHER WAS A BOMB... ON THE DAY I WAS BORN, THE EARTH CRIED!

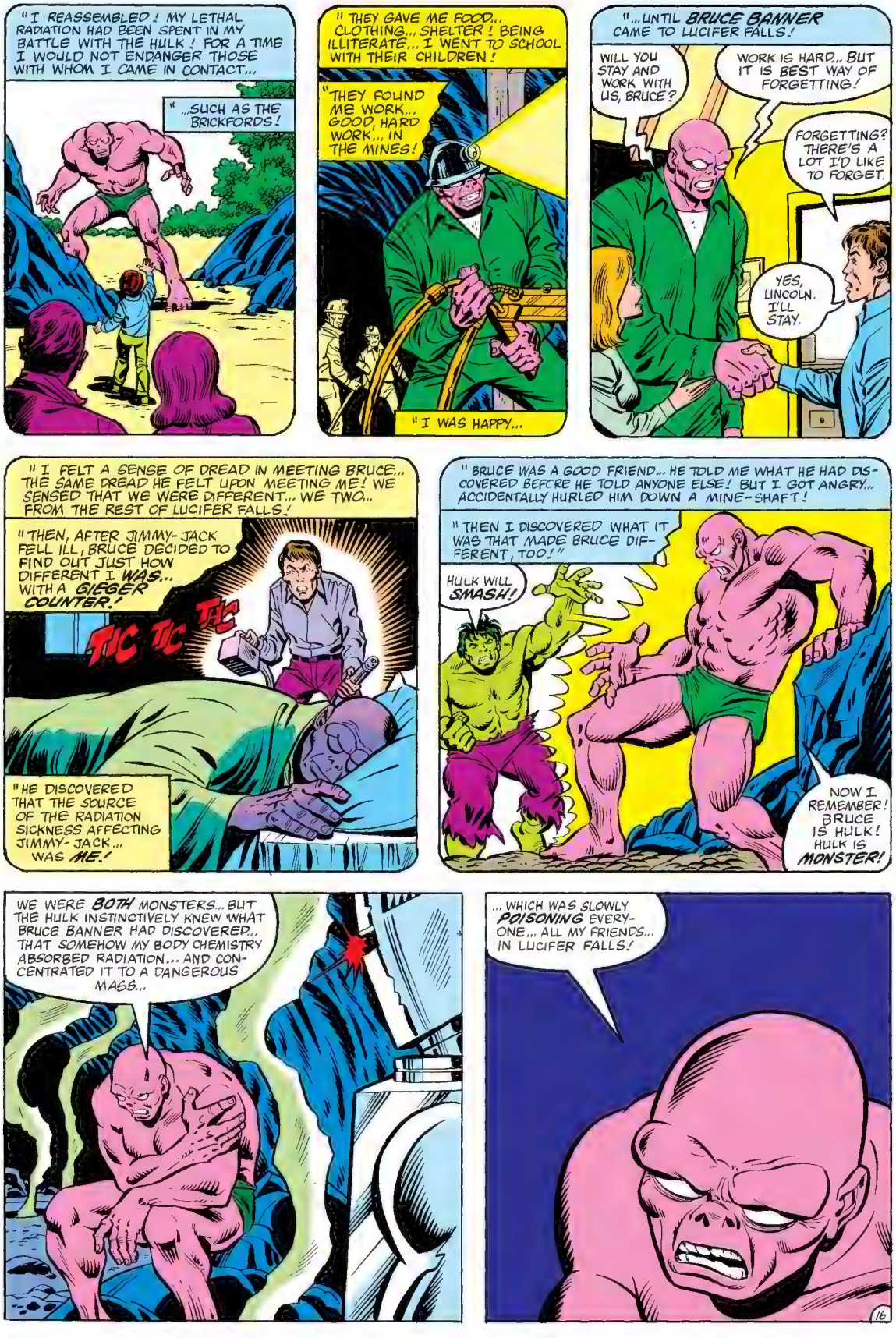
"I WAS A DEADLY BABY! MY TOUCH BURNED! MY PRESENCE CAUSED ALL AROUND ME TO GROW SICK... TO DIE!
"I WAS NOT A MAN... BUT A MISSING LINK!

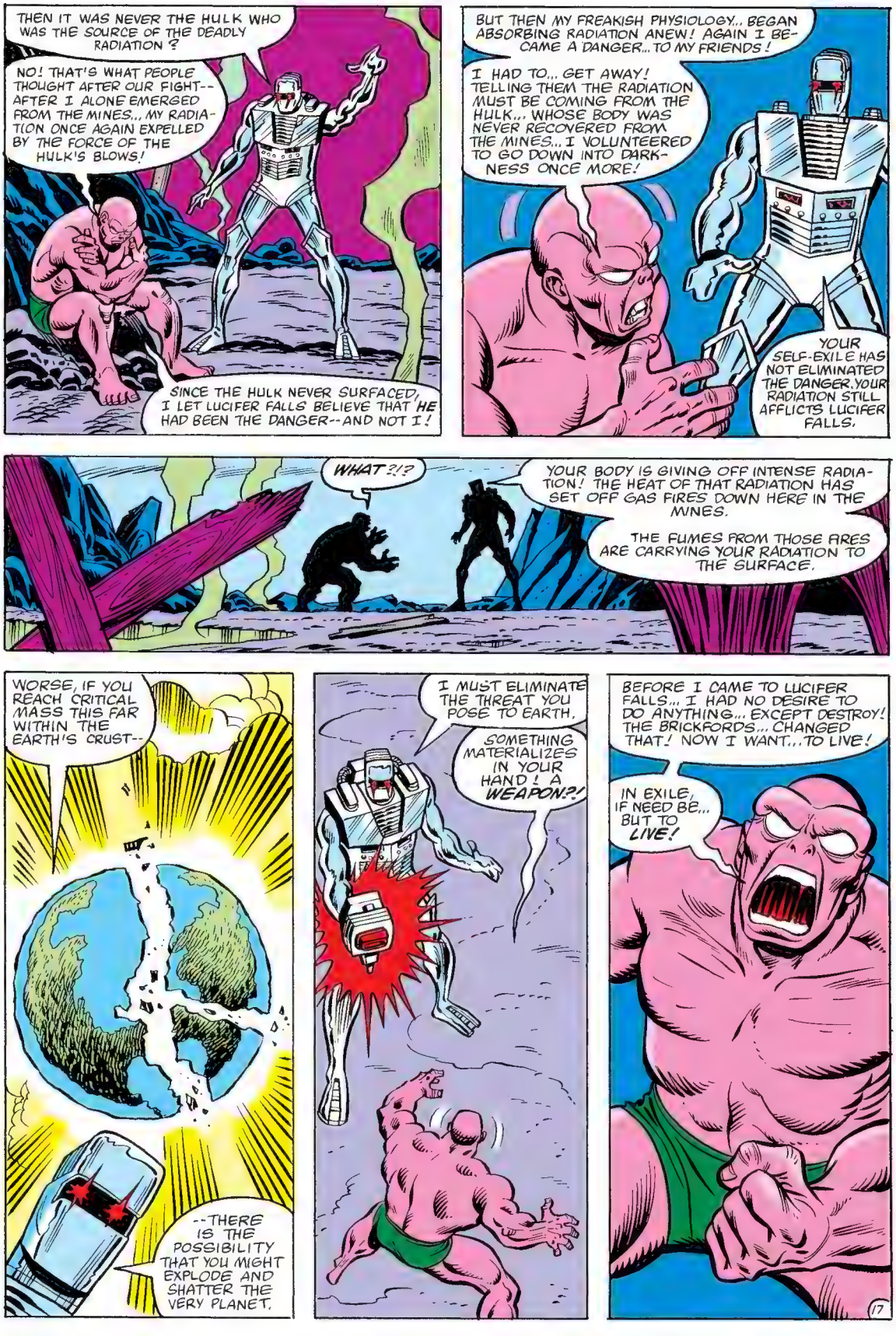
"THOSE WHO CREATED ME SOUGHT TO GET RID OF ME!
"I WAS LAUNCHED TO AMERICA... AND THERE I FIRST MET AND FOUGHT THE INCREDIBLE HULK!

"I WAS MIGHTY, BUT THE HULK WAS MIGHTIER STILL... OUR BATTLE ENDED IN MY DEFEAT!

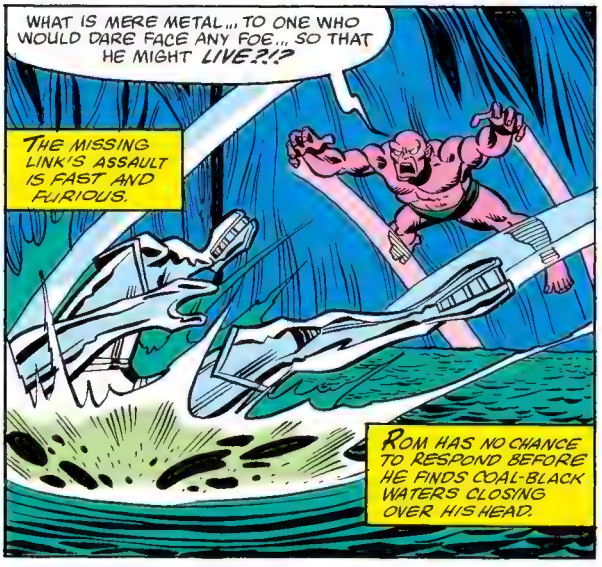
"THE FORCE OF THE HULK'S BLOW SHATTERED ME INTO A HUNDRED MILLION PIECES--

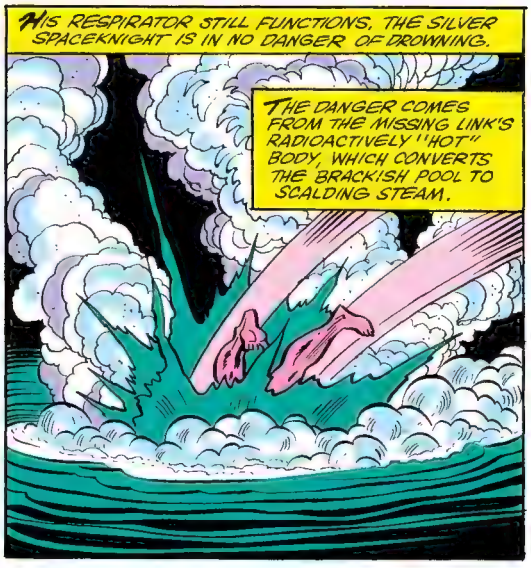

"--ALL OF WHICH FELL LIKE A HARD RAIN UPON THE APPALACHIAN COUNTRYSIDE!
* THE PRECEDING FLASHBACK COURTESY OF THE INCREDIBLE HULK #105-106 -- AL.
15

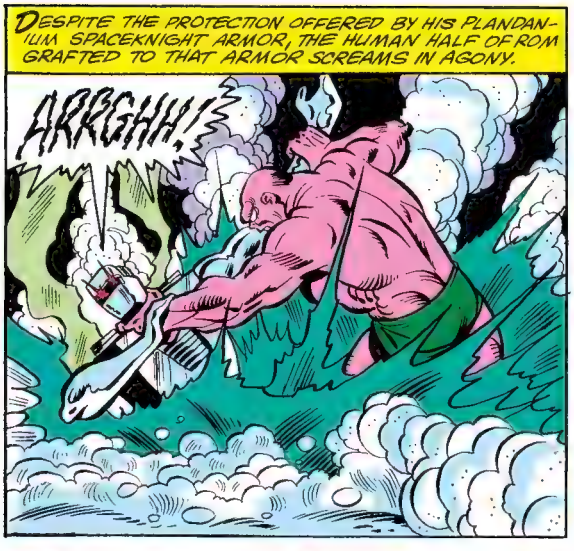

"I REASSEMBLED! MY LETHAL RADIATION HAD BEEN SPENT IN MY BATTLE WITH THE HULK! FOR A TIME I WOULD NOT ENDANGER THOSE WITH WHOM I CAME IN CONTACT...
"...SUCH AS THE BRICKFORDS!
"THEY GAVE ME FOOD... CLOTHING... SHELTER! BEING ILLITERATE... I WENT TO SCHOOL WITH THEIR CHILDREN!
"THEY FOUND ME WORK... GOOD, HARD WORK... IN THE MINES!
"I WAS HAPPY...
"...UNTIL BRUCE BANNER CAME TO LUCIFER FALLS!
WILL YOU STAY AND WORK WITH US, BRUCE?
WORK IS HARD... BUT IT IS BEST WAY OF FORGETTING!
FORGETTING? THERE'S A LOT I'D LIKE TO FORGET.
YES, LINCOLN. I'LL STAY.
"I FELT A SENSE OF DREAD IN MEETING BRUCE... THE SAME DREAD HE FELT UPON MEETING ME! WE SENSED THAT WE WERE DIFFERENT... WE TWO... FROM THE REST OF LUCIFER FALLS!
"THEN, AFTER JIMMY-JACK FELL ILL, BRUCE DECIDED TO FIND OUT JUST HOW DIFFERENT I WAS... WITH A GIEGER COUNTER!
TIC TIC TIC
"HE DISCOVERED THAT THE SOURCE OF THE RADIATION SICKNESS AFFECTING JIMMY-JACK... WAS ME!
"BRUCE WAS A GOOD FRIEND... HE TOLD ME WHAT HE HAD DISCOVERED BEFCRE HE TOLD ANYONE ELSE! BUT I GOT ANGRY... ACCIDENTALLY HURLED HIM DOWN A MINE-SHAFT!
"THEN I DISCOVERED WHAT IT WAS THAT MADE BRUCE DIFFERENT, TOO!"
HULK WILL SMASH!
NOW I REMEMBER! BRUCE IS HULK! HULK IS MONSTER!
WE WERE BOTH MONSTERS... BUT THE HULK INSTINCTIVELY KNEW WHAT BRUCE BANNER HAD DISCOVERED... THAT SOMEHOW MY BODY CHEMISTRY ABSORBED RADIATION... AND CONCENTRATED IT TO A DANGEROUS MASS...
...WHICH WAS SLOWLY POISONING EVERYONE... ALL MY FRIENDS... IN LUCIFER FALLS!
16

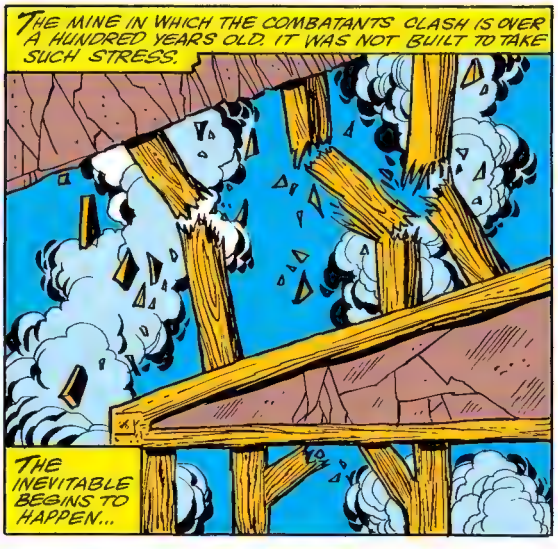

THEN IT WAS NEVER THE HULK WHO WAS THE SOURCE OF THE DEADLY RADIATION ?
NO! THAT'S WHAT PEOPLE THOUGHT AFTER OUR FIGHT-- AFTER I ALONE EMERGED FROM THE MINES... MY RADIATION ONCE AGAIN EXPELLED BY THE FORCE OF THE HULK'S BLOWS!
SINCE THE HULK NEVER SURFACED, I LET LUCIFER FALLS BELIEVE THAT HE HAD BEEN THE DANGER--AND NOT I!
BUT THEN MY FREAKISH PHYSIOLOGY... BEGAN ABSORBING RADIATION ANEW! AGAIN I BECAME A DANGER... TO MY FRIENDS!
I HAD TO... GET AWAY! TELLING THEM THE RADIATION MUST BE COMING FROM THE HULK... WHOSE BODY WAS NEVER RECOVERED FROM THE MINES... I VOLUNTEERED TO GO DOWN INTO DARKNESS ONCE MORE!
YOUR SELF-EXILE HAS NOT ELIMINATED THE DANGER. YOUR RADIATION STILL AFFLICTS LUCIFER FALLS.
WHAT?!?
YOUR BODY IS GIVING OFF INTENSE RADIATION! THE HEAT OF THAT RADIATION HAS SET OFF GAS FIRES DOWN HERE IN THE MINES.
THE FUMES FROM THOSE FIRES ARE CARRYING YOUR RADIATION TO THE SURFACE.
WORSE, IF YOU REACH CRITICAL MASS THIS FAR WITHIN THE EARTH'S CRUST--
--THERE IS THE POSSIBILITY THAT YOU MIGHT EXPLODE AND SHATTER THE VERY PLANET.
I MUST ELIMINATE THE THREAT YOU POSE TO EARTH.
SOMETHING MATERIALIZES IN YOUR HAND! A WEAPON?!
BEFORE I CAME TO LUCIFER FALLS... I HAD NO DESIRE TO DO ANYTHING... EXCEPT DESTROY! THE BRICKFORDS... CHANGED THAT! NOW I WANT... TO LIVE!
IN EXILE, IF NEED BE... BUT TO LIVE!
17

BUT I HAD NO INTENTION OF USING MY NEUTRALIZER TO--! ARRGH!
PERHAPS... IN TIME... MY RADIATION WILL DISPEL ITSELF NATURALLY! PERHAPS THEN... I CAN REJOIN MY FRIENDS...WORK... FORGET WHAT I AM!
I WILL NOT LET YOU ROB ME... OF THAT POSSIBILITY! I WILL NOT LET YOU... END MY LIFE!
I WHO HAVE THRICE SURVIVED... THE MURDEROUS MIGHT OF THE INCREDIBLE HULK... AM POWERFUL ENOUGH TO PREVENT MY LIFE... FROM BEING TAKEN BY THE LIKES OF YOU!
SPLAK!
I DO NOT KNOW... IF YOU WEAR METAL... OR IF YOU ARE METAL!
IT DOES NOT MATTER!
WHAT IS MERE METAL... TO ONE WHOSE MEREST TOUCH... CAUSES OBJECTS TO BURST INTO FLAMES?
SKAPLANG!
WHAT IS MERE METAL... TO ONE WITH THE STRENGTH... TO TURN ANY OBJECT INTO A BLUDGEONING BATTERING RAM?!
18


WHAT IS MERE METAL... TO ONE WHO WOULD DARE FACE ANY FOE... SO THAT HE MIGHT LIVE?!?
THE MISSING LINK'S ASSAULT IS FAST AND FURIOUS.
ROM HAS NO CHANCE TO RESPOND BEFORE HE FINDS COAL-BLACK WATERS CLOSING OVER HIS HEAD.


HIS RESPIRATOR STILL FUNCTIONS. THE SILVER SPACEKNIGHT IS IN NO DANGER OF DROWNING.
THE DANGER COMES FROM THE MISSING LINK'S RADIOACTIVELY "HOT" BODY, WHICH CONVERTS THE BRACKISH POOL TO SCALDING STEAM.

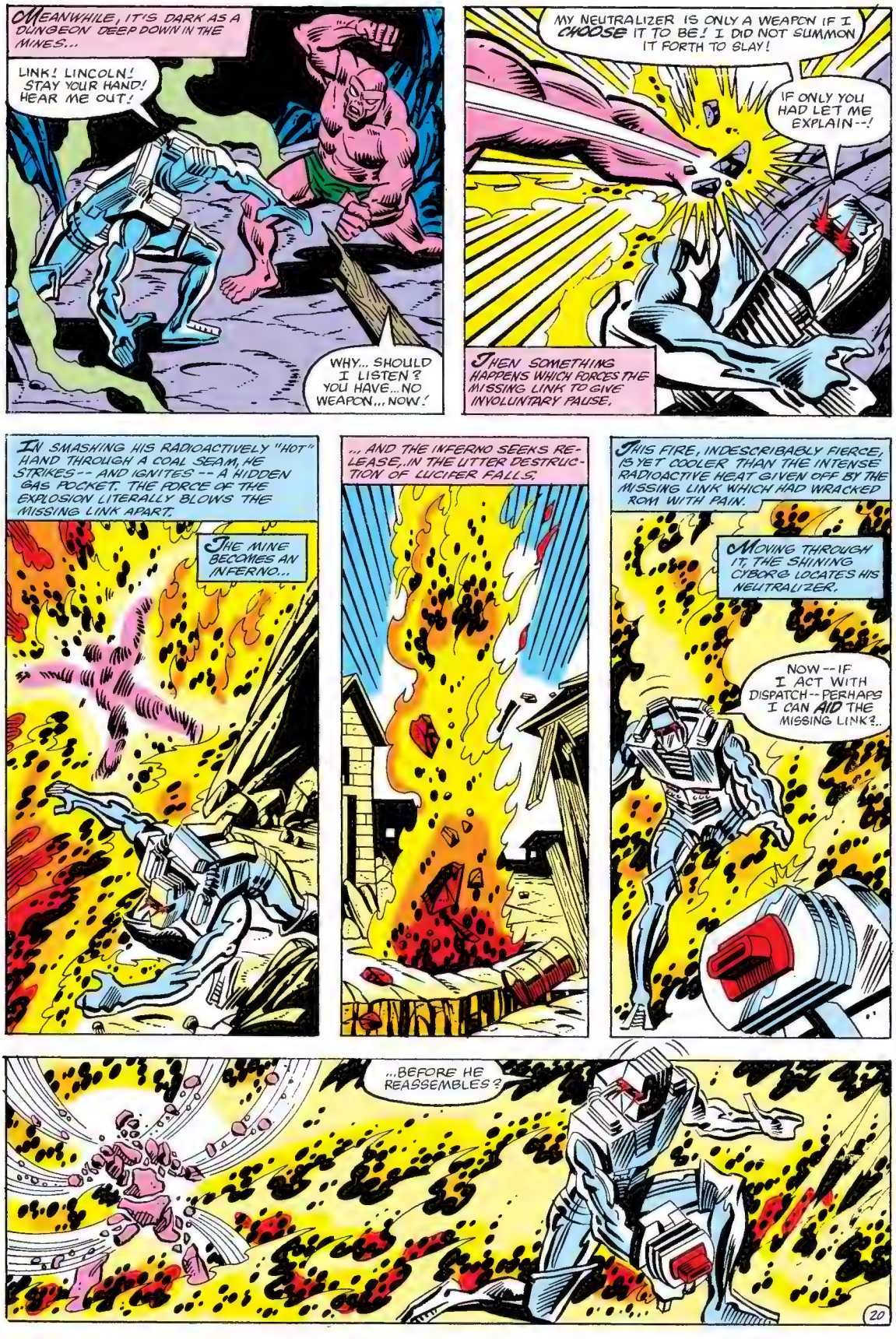

DESPITE THE PROTECTION OFFERED BY HIS PLANDANIUM SPACEKNIGHT ARMOR, THE HUMAN HALF OF ROM GRAFTED TO THAT ARMOR SCREAMS IN AGONY.
ARRGHH!

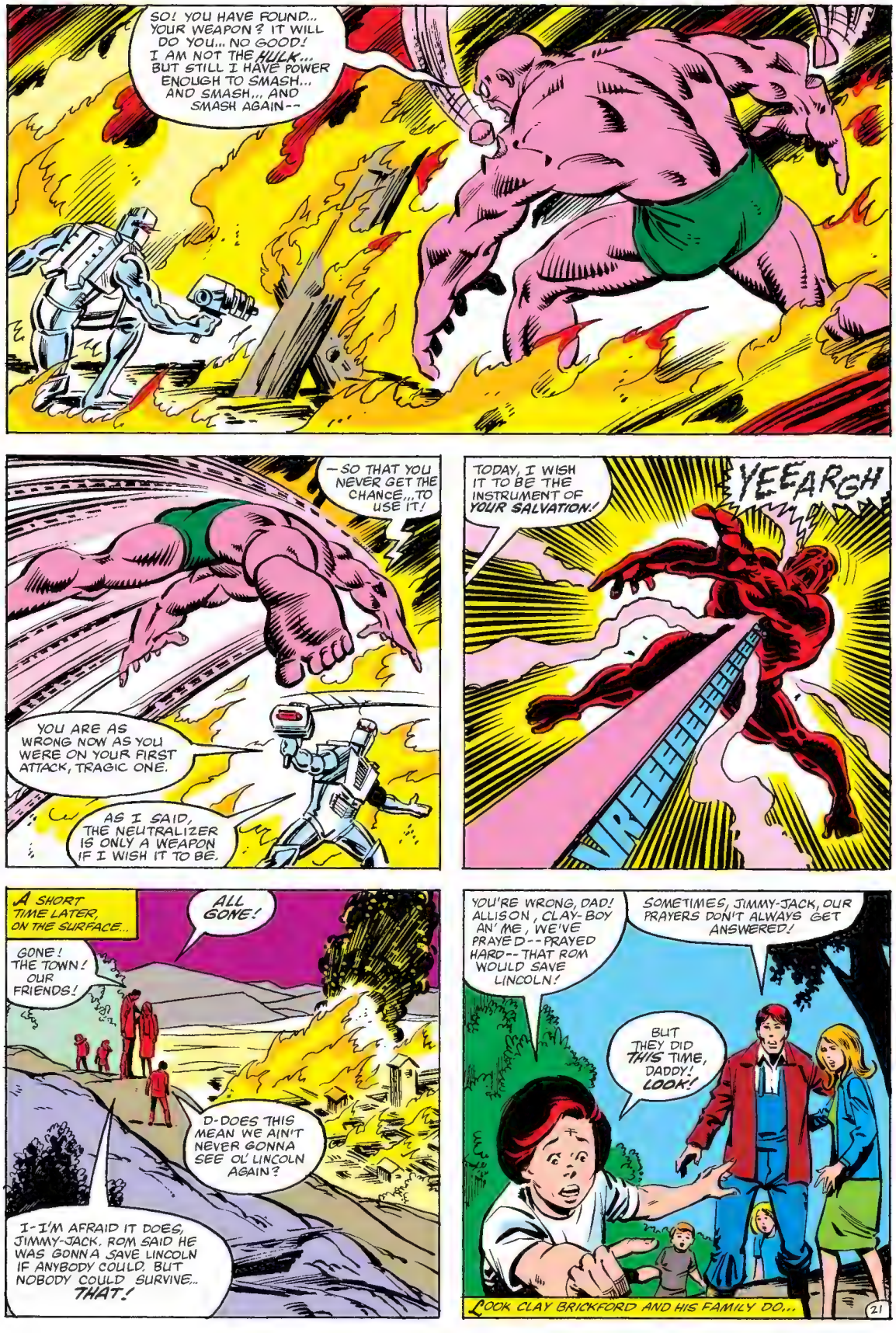

THE MINE IN WHICH THE COMBATANTS CLASH IS OVER A HUNDRED YEARS OLD. IT WAS NOT BUILT TO TAKE SUCH STRESS.
THE INEVITABLE BEGINS TO HAPPEN...

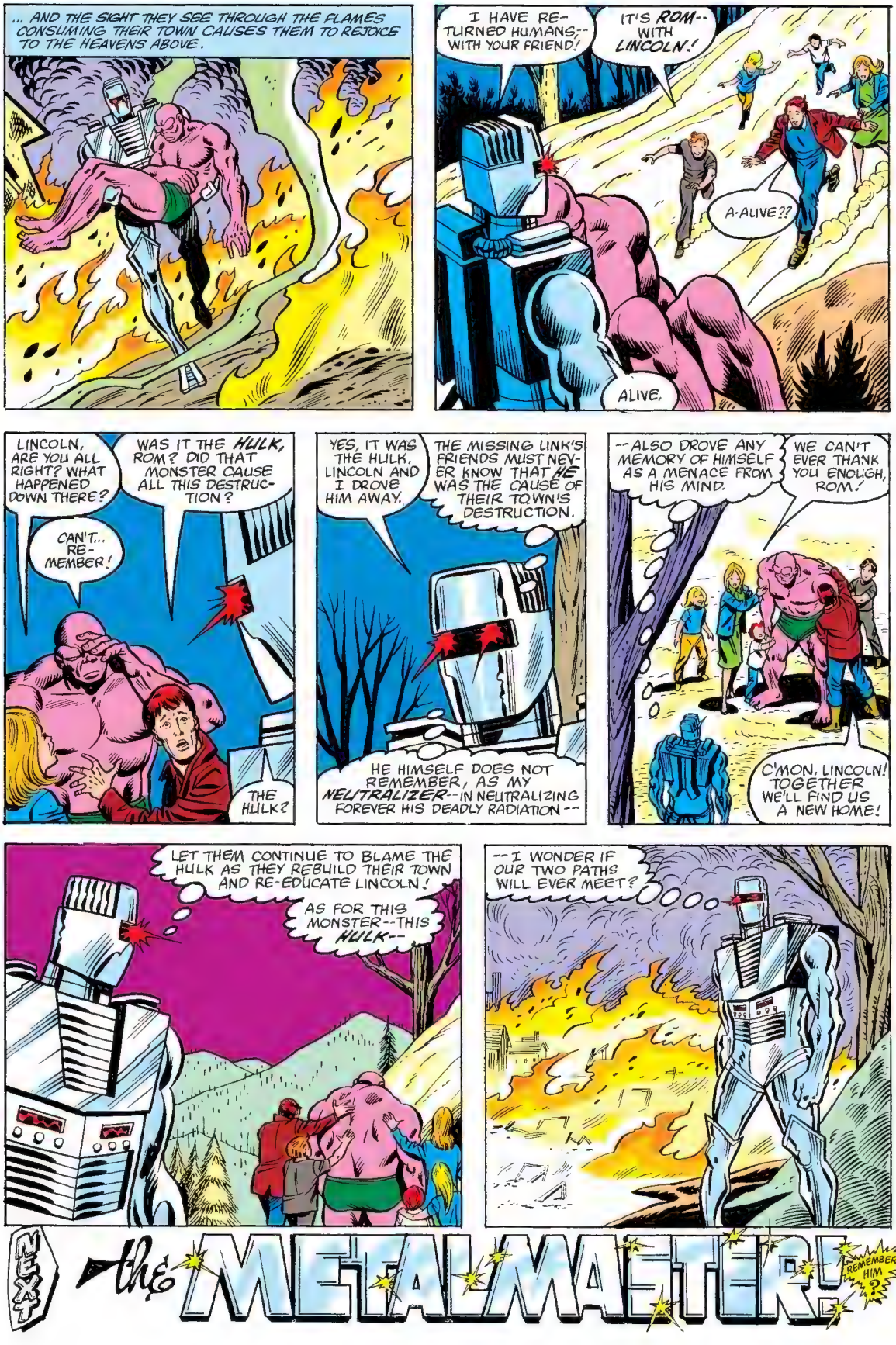
CAVE IN! LUCIFER FALLS IS STARTING TO BOTTOM OUT!

DADDY, COME BACK!
CLAY, YOU CAN'T GO IN THERE!
I GOTTA, BELINDA HONEY!
LINCOLN AN' ROM ARE DOWN THERE!

ARE THEY, CLAY--OR HAS THE HULK KILLED THEM, TOO, AS HIS RADIATION'S KILLED OUR TOWN?
IF THEY COULDN'T STOP HIM, WHAT CHANCE DO YOU HAVE?
CLAY BRICKFORD IS A BRAVE MAN, BUT HE KNOWS THAT HE WOULD HAVE NO CHANCE AT ALL.
19


MEANWHILE, IT'S DARK AS A DUNGEON DEEP DOWN IN THE MINES...
LINK! LINCOLN! STAY YOUR HAND! HEAR ME OUT!
WHY... SHOULD I LISTEN? YOU HAVE...NO WEAPON,,, NOW!
MY NEUTRALIZER IS ONLY A WEAPON IF I CHOOSE IT TO BE! I DID NOT SUMMON IT FORTH TO SLAY!
IF ONLY YOU HAD LET ME EXPLAIN--!
THEN SOMETHING HAPPENS WHICH FORCES THE MISSING LINK TO GIVE INVOLUNTARY PAUSE.
IN SMASHING HIS RADIOACTIVELY "HOT" HAND THROUGH A COAL SEAM, HE STRIKES-- AND IGNITES -- A HIDDEN GAS POCKET. THE FORCE OF THE EXPLOSION LITERALLY BLOWS THE MISSING LINK APART.
THE MINE BECOMES AN INFERNO...
,,, AND THE INFERNO SEEKS RELEASE, IN THE UTTER DESTRUCTION OF LUCIFER FALLS.
THIS FIRE, INDESCRIBABLY FIERCE, IS YET COOLER THAN THE INTENSE RADIOACTIVE HEAT GIVEN OFF BY THE MISSING LINK WHICH HAD WRACKED ROM WITH PAIN.
MOVING THROUGH IT, THE SHINING CYBORG LOCATES HIS NEUTRALIZER.
NOW--IF I ACT WITH DISPATCH--PERHAPS I CAN AID THE MISSING LINK?..
,,,BEFORE HE REASSEMBLES?
20


SO! YOU HAVE FOUND... YOUR WEAPON? IT WILL DO YOU... NO GOOD! I AM NOT THE HULK... BUT STILL I HAVE POWER ENOUGH TO SMASH... AND SMASH... AND SMASH AGAIN--
—SO THAT YOU NEVER GET THE CHANCE...TO USE IT!
YOU ARE AS WRONG NOW AS YOU WERE ON YOUR FIRST ATTACK, TRAGIC ONE.
AS I SAID, THE NEUTRALIZER IS ONLY A WEAPON IF I WISH IT TO BE.
TODAY, I WISH IT TO BE THE INSTRUMENT OF YOUR SALVATION!
YEEARGH
VREEEEEEEEEE
A SHORT TIME LATER, ON THE SURFACE...
ALL GONE!
GONE! THE TOWN! OUR FRIENDS!
D-DOES THIS MEAN WE AIN'T NEVER GONNA SEE OL' LINCOLN AGAIN?
I-I'M AFRAID IT DOES, JIMMY-JACK. ROM SAID HE WAS GONNA SAVE LINCOLN IF ANYBODY COULD. BUT NOBODY COULD SURVIVE... THAT!
YOU'RE WRONG, DAD! ALLISON, CLAY-BOY AN' ME, WE'VE PRAYED--PRAYED HARD--THAT ROM WOULD SAVE LINCOLN!
SOMETIMES, JIMMY-JACK, OUR PRAYERS DON'T ALWAYS GET ANSWERED!
BUT THEY DID THIS TIME, DADDY! LOOK!
LOOK CLAY BRICKFORD AND HIS FAMILY DO...
21


... AND THE SIGHT THEY SEE THROUGH THE FLAMES CONSUMING THEIR TOWN CAUSES THEM TO REJOICE TO THE HEAVENS ABOVE.
I HAVE RE-TURNED HUMANS--WITH YOUR FRIEND!
IT'S ROM--WITH LINCOLN!
A-ALIVE??
ALIVE.
LINCOLN, ARE YOU ALL RIGHT? WHAT HAPPENED DOWN THERE?
WAS IT THE HULK, ROM? DID THAT MONSTER CAUSE ALL THIS DESTRUC-TION?
CAN'T... RE-MEMBER!
THE HULK?
YES, IT WAS THE HULK, LINCOLN AND I DROVE HIM AWAY.
THE MISSING LINK'S FRIENDS MUST NEV-ER KNOW THAT HE WAS THE CAUSE OF THEIR TOWN'S DESTRUCTION.
HE HIMSELF DOES NOT REMEMBER, AS MY NEUTRALIZER--IN NEUTRALIZING FOREVER HIS DEADLY RADIATION--
--ALSO DROVE ANY MEMORY OF HIMSELF AS A MENACE FROM HIS MIND.
WE CAN'T EVER THANK YOU ENOUGH, ROM!
C'MON, LINCOLN! TOGETHER WE'LL FIND US A NEW HOME!
LET THEM CONTINUE TO BLAME THE HULK AS THEY REBUILD THEIR TOWN AND RE-EDUCATE LINCOLN!
AS FOR THIS MONSTER--THIS HULK--
--I WONDER IF OUR TWO PATHS WILL EVER MEET?
NEXT
the METAL MASTER!
REMEMBER HIM??

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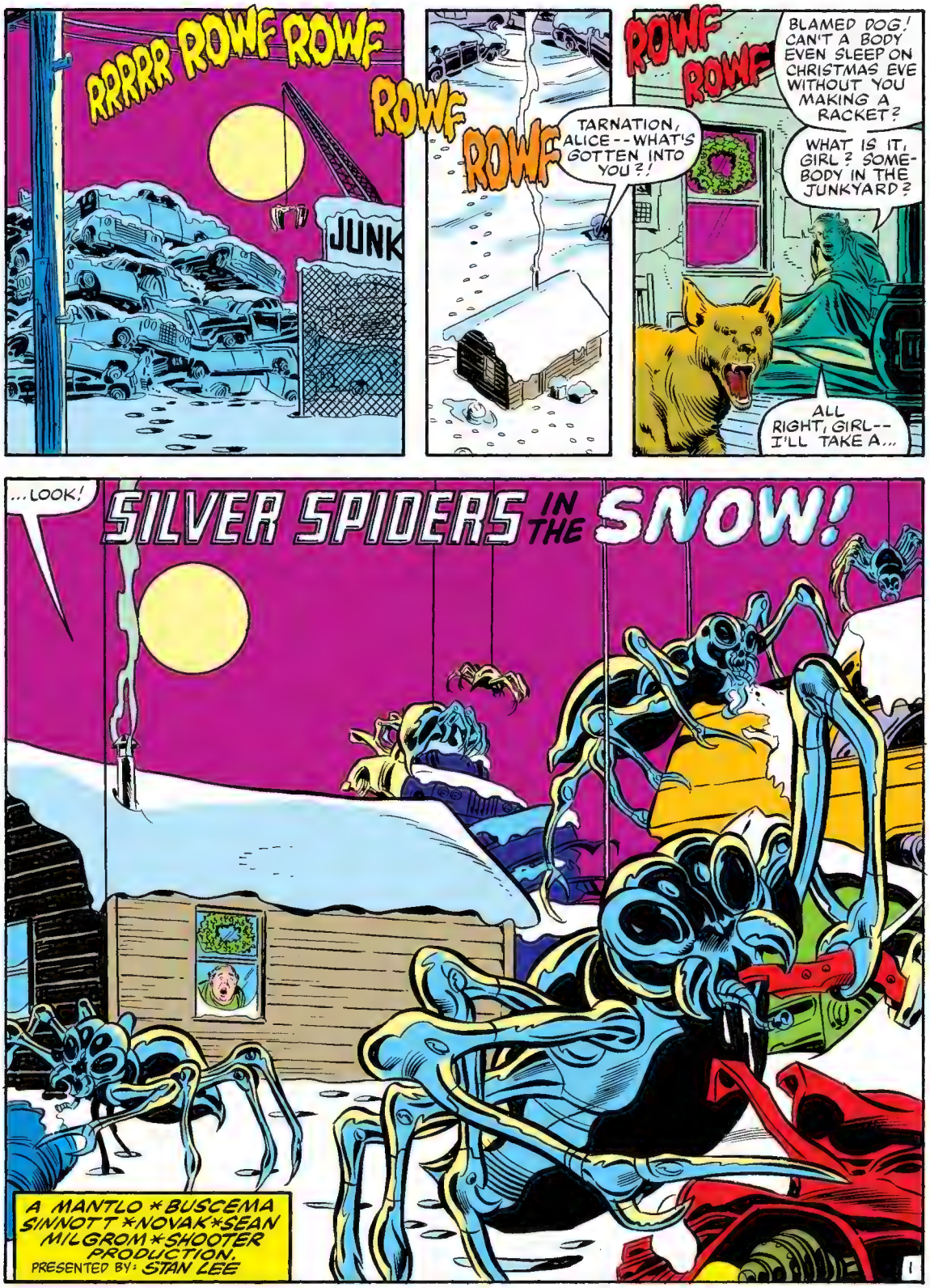
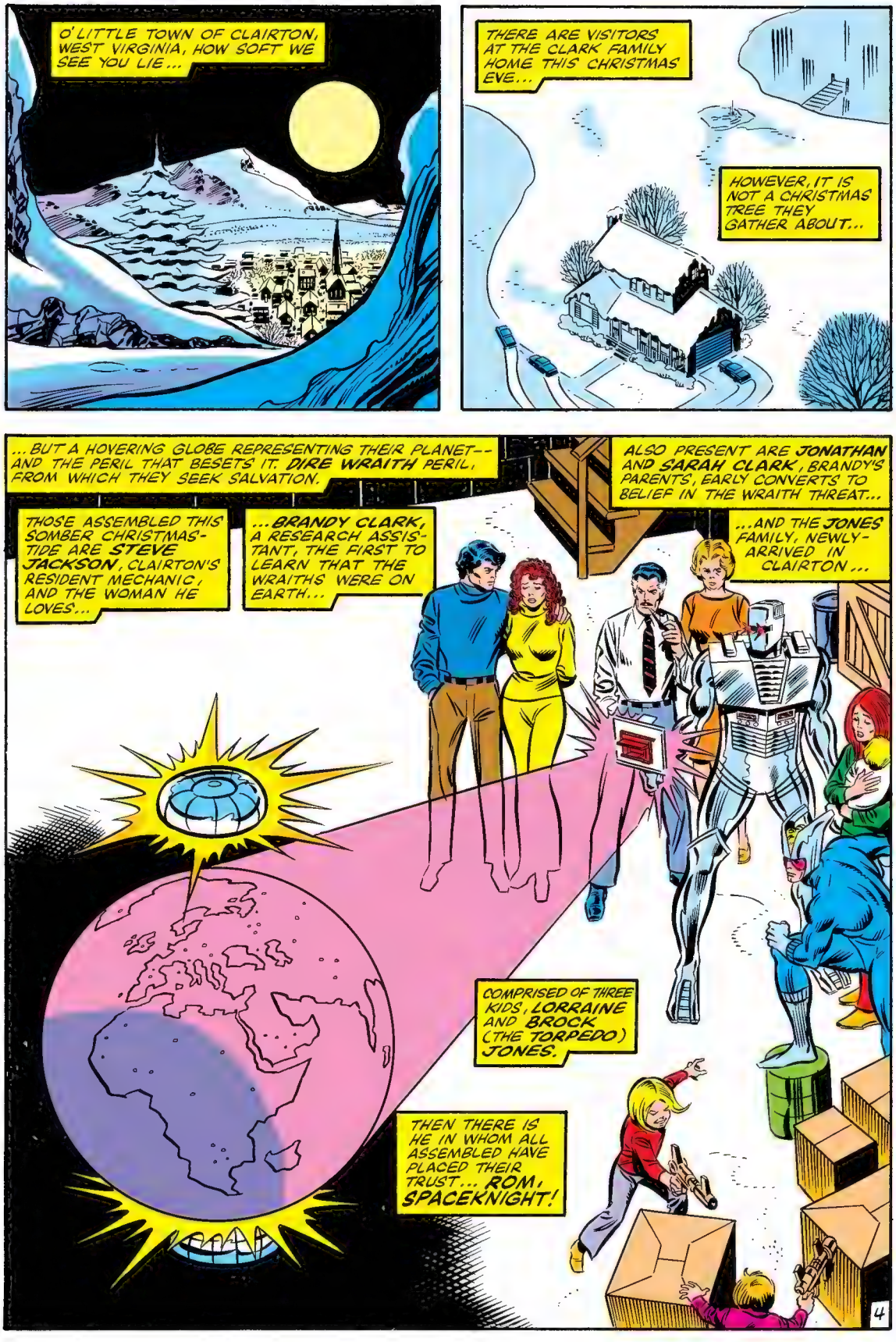

RRRRR ROWF ROWF
ROWF
ROWF
JUNK
TARNATION, ALICE--WHAT'S GOTTEN INTO YOU?!
ROWF ROWF
BLAMED DOG! CAN'T A BODY EVEN SLEEP ON CHRISTMAS EVE WITHOUT YOU MAKING A RACKET?
WHAT IS IT, GIRL? SOMEBODY IN THE JUNKYARD?
ALL RIGHT, GIRL--I'LL TAKE A...
...LOOK!
SILVER SPIDERS IN THE SNOW!
A MANTLO * BUSCEMA SINNOTT * NOVAK * SEAN MILGROM * SHOOTER PRODUCTION.
PRESENTED BY: STAN LEE

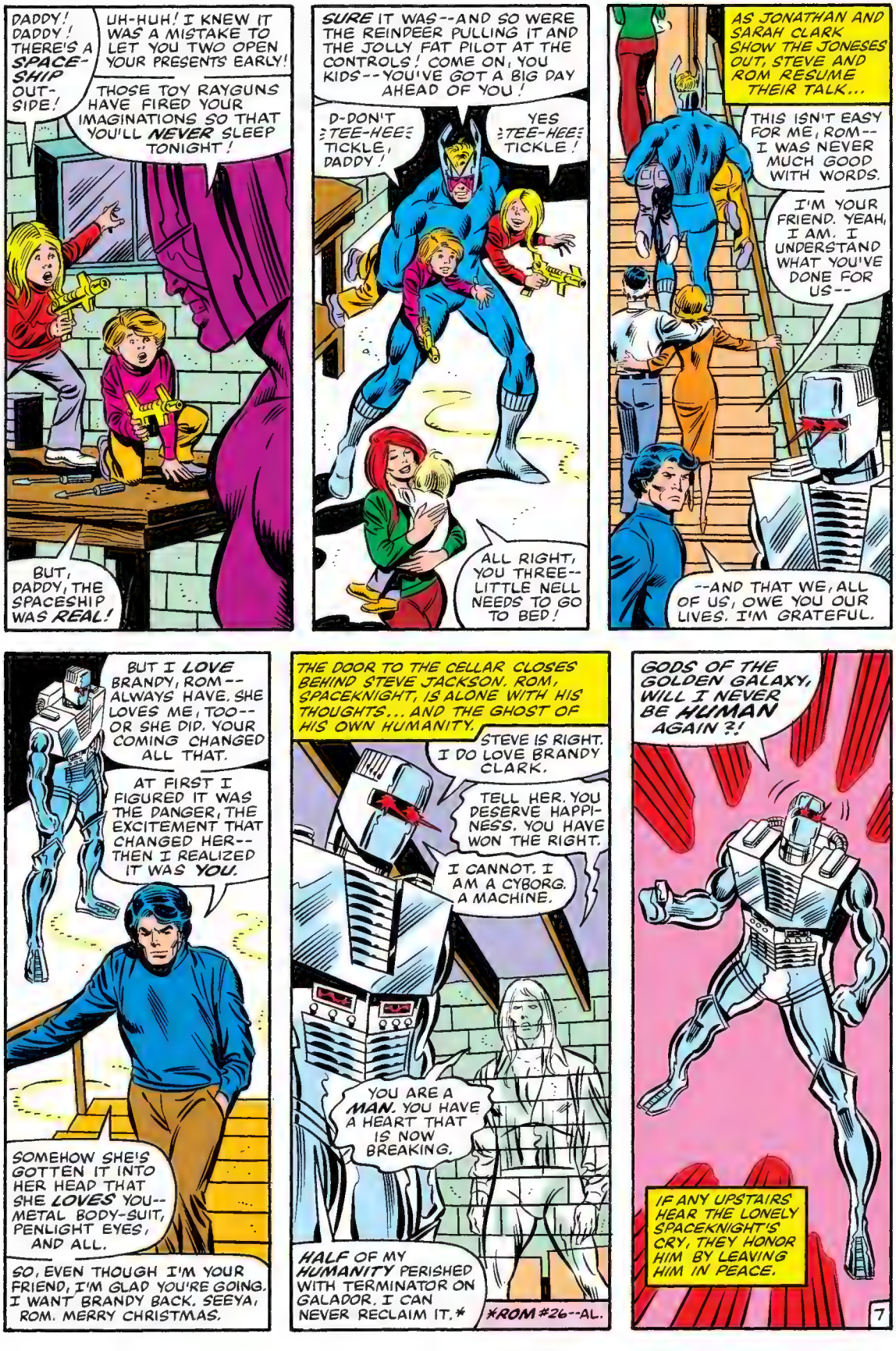
ROWF ROWF
YOU WERE RIGHT TO BARK, ALICE! THOSE UGLIES ARE EATING MY JUNK!
GOTTA PROTECT IT! THAT SCRAP METAL'S MY LIVELIHOOD!
SQUEEEE
KPOW
SUNNUVAGUN! THEY LOOK LIKE THEY'RE MADE OUTTA METAL, BUT I STILL BLEW ONE AWAY!
THERE ARE, HOWEVER, OTHERS...
...AS BERNIE TARPIN, PROPRIETOR OF CLAIRTON SCRAP IRON & JUNK IS ABOUT TO FIND OUT.
SOMETHING WRAPPING AROUND ME--?!
SOME KIND OF SPIDER'S WEB!
SQUEET
SAINTS ALIVE! ALICE-- HELP!
RRRR
ROWF
YIIIPE
SQUEEEE
HOT SLIME DRIPPING FROM ITS FANGS! ACID! IT'S GONNA DISSOLVE AND EAT ME LIKE IT ATE MY JUNK!
BRALLOOM!
NOOOO!
THOUGH ENMESHED, BERNIE TARPIN ACTS INSTINCTIVELY TO SAVE HIS OWN LIFE...

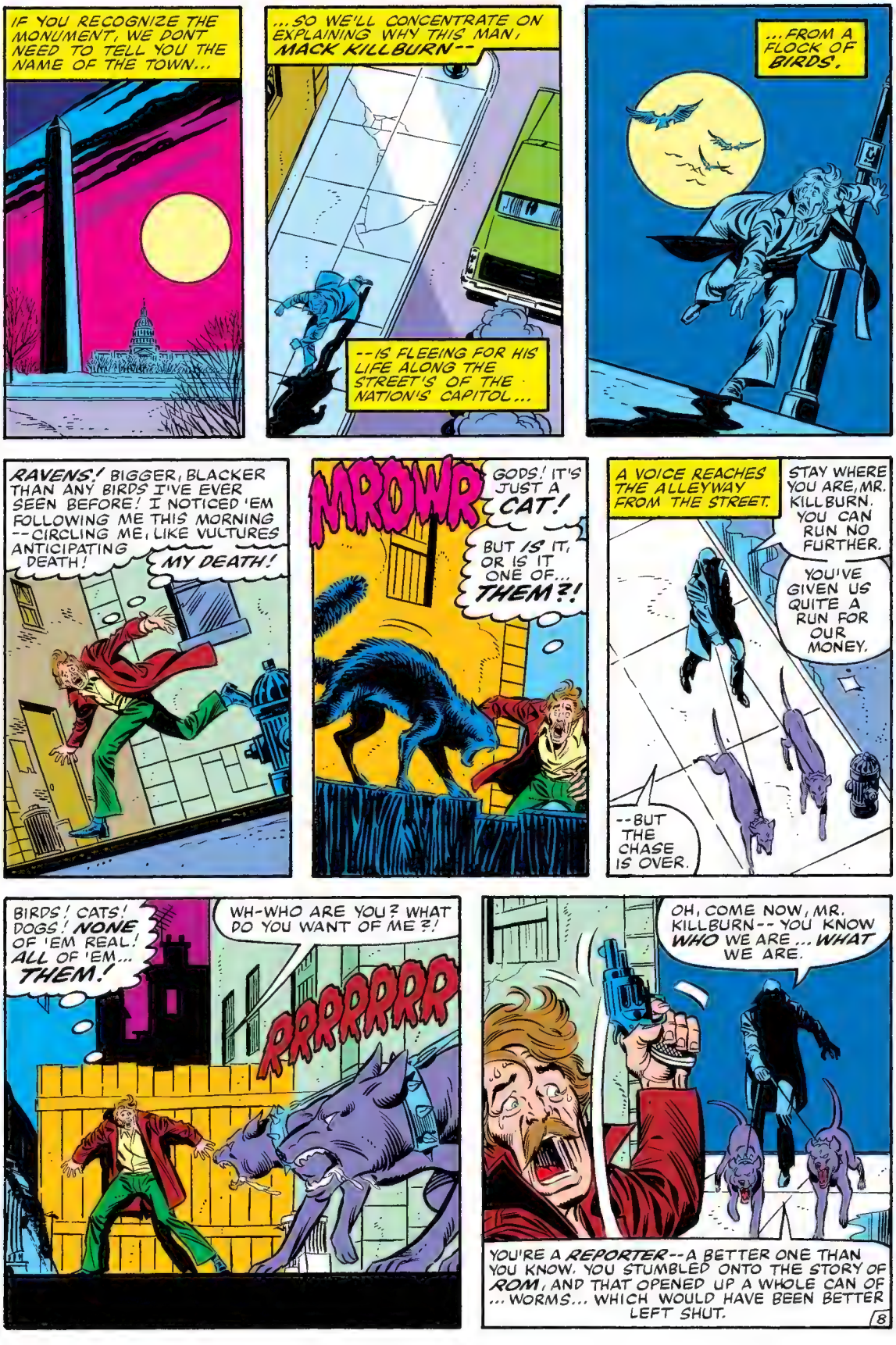
...AND THEN, MERCIFULLY, FAINTS.
SENSING THAT HE WILL DISTURB THEM NO FURTHER, THE SILVER SPIDERS GO BACK ABOUT THEIR BUSINESS...
OR, RATHER...
...THEIR METAL MASTER'S BUSINESS!
BE SWIFT, MY SILVER CREATURES! CONSUME ALL THE EARTHLY METAL YOUR ARACHNID ABDOMENS CAN CONTAIN...
...AND THEN LET US RETURN TO OUR WAITING CRAFT--
--WHERE THE METAL MASTER MAY ANALYZE THE METALLIC SAMPLES YOU HAVE INGESTED!
OBEYING THE GOLDEN-HUED ALIEN, THE SPIDERS RISE INTO THE NIGHT ON SLENDER STRANDS OF SILVER WEBBING.
I MUST LEARN IF THERE IS ANY METAL ON EARTH CAPABLE OF FOILING THE PLANS OF THE METAL MASTER!
BERNIE TARPIN REVIVES IN TIME TO SEE THE STRANGE FIGURE GATHER HIS SPIDERS AND DEPART IN A GREAT SILVER SPACESHIP.
YES, BERNIE TARPIN SEES IT.
AS THE NIGHT GROWS LONGER AND COLDER, HE'LL WISH MANY TIMES THAT HE HADN'T.
3

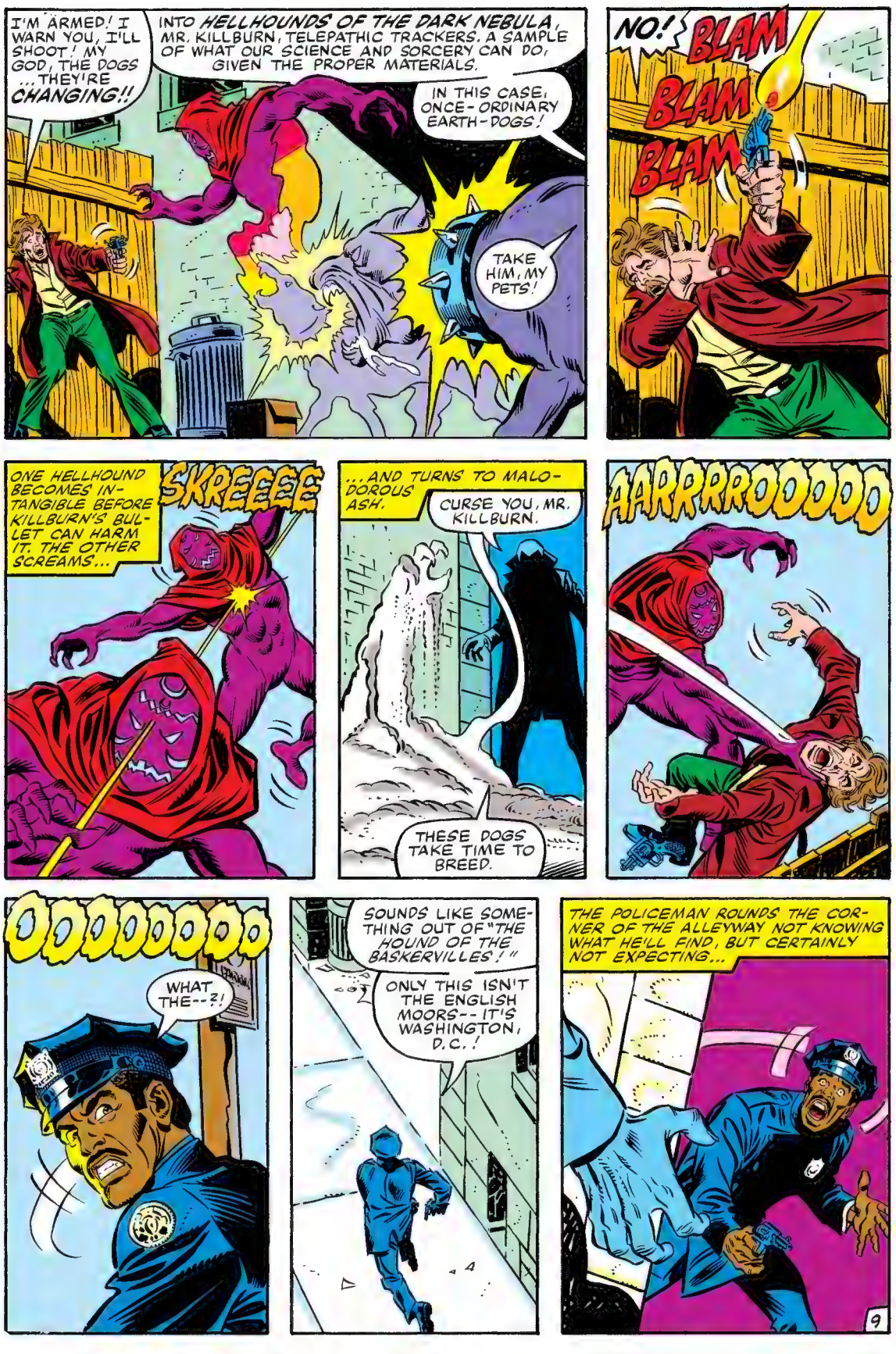

O' LITTLE TOWN OF CLAIRTON, WEST VIRGINIA, HOW SOFT WE SEE YOU LIE...
THERE ARE VISITORS AT THE CLARK FAMILY HOME THIS CHRISTMAS EVE...
HOWEVER, IT IS NOT A CHRISTMAS TREE THEY GATHER ABOUT...
...BUT A HOVERING GLOBE REPRESENTING THEIR PLANET-- AND THE PERIL THAT BESETS IT. DIRE WRAITH PERIL, FROM WHICH THEY SEEK SALVATION.
ALSO PRESENT ARE JONATHAN AND SARAH CLARK, BRANDY'S PARENTS, EARLY CONVERTS TO BELIEF IN THE WRAITH THREAT...
THOSE ASSEMBLED THIS SOMBER CHRISTMAS-TIDE ARE STEVE JACKSON, CLAIRTON'S RESIDENT MECHANIC, AND THE WOMAN HE LOVES...
...BRANDY CLARK, A RESEARCH ASSISTANT, THE FIRST TO LEARN THAT THE WRAITHS WERE ON EARTH...
...AND THE JONES FAMILY, NEWLY-ARRIVED IN CLAIRTON...
COMPRISED OF THREE KIDS, LORRAINE AND BROCK (THE TORPEDO) JONES.
THEN THERE IS HE IN WHOM ALL ASSEMBLED HAVE PLACED THEIR TRUST... ROM, SPACEKNIGHT!
4

JONATHAN AND SARAH CLARK HAVE EXPLAINED TO ME SOME OF THE TRADITIONS AND CUSTOMS OF YOUR CHRISTMAS SEASON. I UNDERSTAND THAT IT IS CHARACTERIZED BY THE GIVING OF GIFTS.
ALLOW ME, THEN, TO GIVE YOU THE ONLY GIFT A SPACEKNIGHT CAN BESTOW--THE GIFT OF PEACE OF MIND!
THE MONITOR GLOBE REGISTERS NO TRACE OF WRAITH ACTIVITY IN THIS SECTOR.
CLAIRTON IS FREE OF WRAITHKIND AT LAST!
SWELL! I WAS HOPING THAT WE'D SEEN THE LAST OF THOSE SLIMY SHAPE-SHIFTERS!
BUT YOU'VE SAID THAT BEFORE, ROM--AND YET THE WRAITHS RETURNED!
AND WE DROVE THEM AWAY, DAUGHTER--WITHOUT ROM'S HELP!
WE TAUGHT THEM THAT EARTH IS OUR WORLD--AND THAT WE'LL FIGHT TO KEEP IT!
SO NOW YOU'RE GOING TO LEAVE AGAIN, AREN'T YOU, ROM? LEAVE A TOWN THAT'S OFFERED YOU A HOME, AND PEOPLE WHO... LOVE YOU!
HIS JOB HERE IS DONE, BRANDY!
STEVE'S RIGHT, BRANDY! AS LONG AS ROM WAS THE ONLY ONE ABLE TO SEE THROUGH THE DIRE WRAITH'S DISGUISES, WE RELIED ON HIM FOR SECURITY!
BUT NOW THE BOYS AT THE LAB WHERE YOU WORK HAVE MODIFIED MY TORPEDO VISOR!
ONCE ROM "ACTIVATES" THE ENHANCED BIOPTIC ABILITY OF MY VISOR, I'LL BE ABLE TO SPOT THE WRAITHS AS WELL!
THEN NOTHING WILL STOP THE TORPEDO FROM DEFENDING HIS TOWN AND LOVED ONES!
THEN I'LL REALLY BE THE HERO I'VE ALWAYS WANTED TO BE!
GO AHEAD, ROM--I'M READY AND WILLING!
YOU ARE BRAVE, MAN OF EARTH!
5

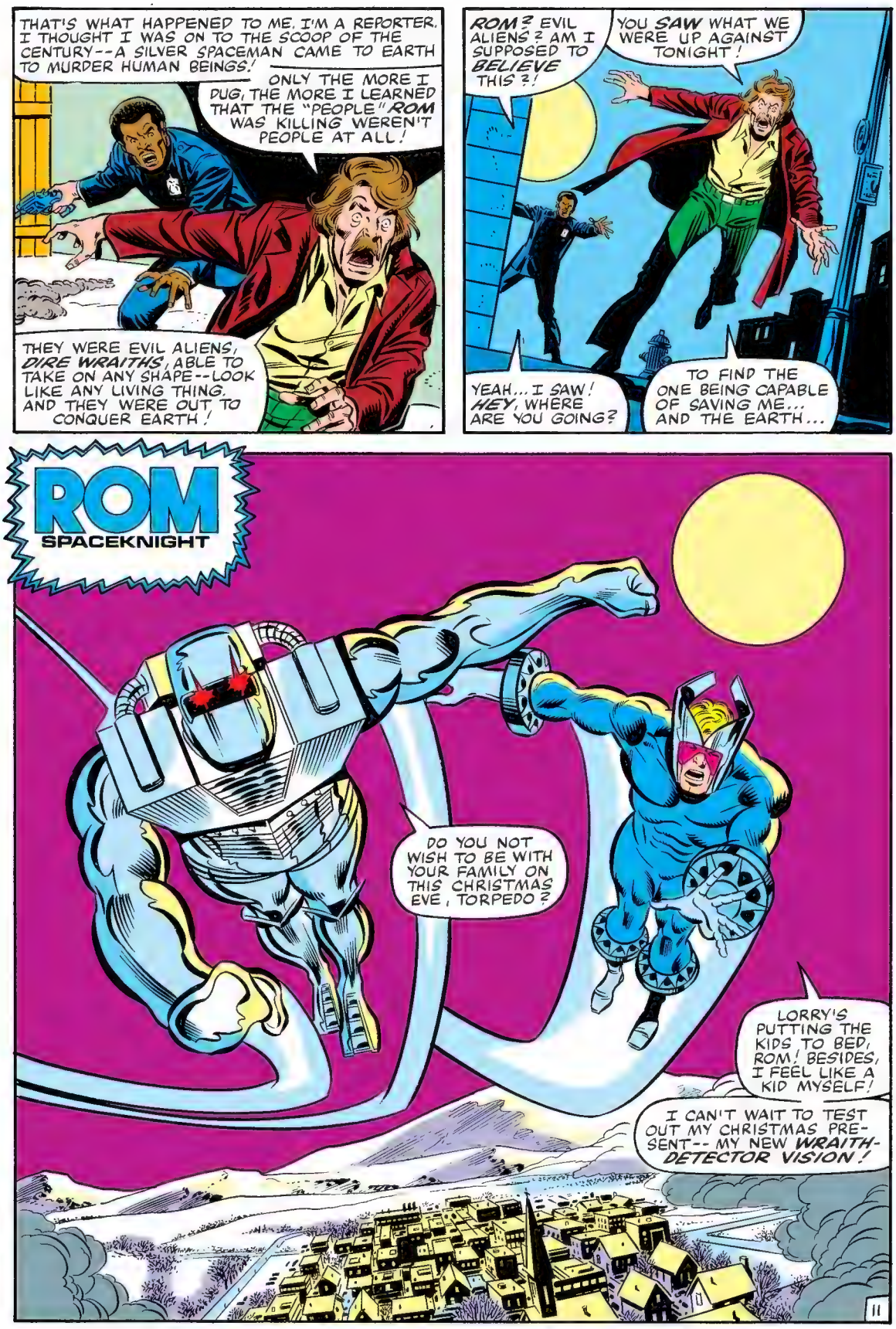
ONLY REALIZE THAT THE GIFT I BESTOW UPON YOU IS NO GIFT AT ALL!
TO SEE WRAITHKIND AS THEY ARE IS TO KNOW SUCH HORROR AS SHOULD NEVER BE COUNTENANCED.
THERE MAY COME A TIME WHEN YOU WOULD PLUCK YOUR EYES FROM THEIR SOCKETS RATHER THAN SEE MORE.
I'LL TAKE THAT CHANCE, ROM! IT'S BETTER THAN GOING INTO BATTLE BLIND!
IS IT? AYE, 'TIS A TRUTH STARSHINE LEARNED ONLY TOO WELL!
YOUR SISTER SPACEKNIGHT DIED BECAUSE SHE FAILED TO TURN HER CYBORG VISION ON THOSE WHO LOOKED LIKE FRIENDS!*
DON'T YOU EVER TAKE THAT CHANCE, TORP! ANALYZE US!
*ROM #28--AL.
TORPEDO DOES, AND ALL PRESENT ARE REVEALED AS HUMAN.
NOW CLAIRTON HAS A DEFENDER EQUAL TO THE TASK!
AND NOW ROM, SPACEKNIGHT CAN SOAR OUT OF OUR LIVES ...AND HEARTS... WITHOUT EVER HAVING TO LOOK BACK!
ROM TRIES TO CALL BRANDY CLARK BACK...
...BUT SOMETHING STOPS HIM.
A WORD FROM YOU WOULD HAVE BROUGHT HER RUNNING TO YOUR METAL ARMS, ROM.
I COULD NOT SPEAK IT.
YEAH, I KNOW--YOUR NOBILITY GOT IN THE WAY. OR MAYBE YOU REALIZED HOW IMPOSSIBLE YOUR LOVE FOR BRANDY IS.
I HAVE NEVER SAID...
YOU DON'T HAVE TO. IT'S NOT HARD FOR ONE GUY WHO LOVES HER TO TELL THAT ANOTHER GUY DOES, TOO.
AS STEVE AND ROM CONVERSE IN HUSHED TONES UNHEARD BY ANYONE ELSE IN THE CLARK'S CELLAR, ANNIE AND DANNY JONES, PLAYING WITH THEIR EARLY CHRISTMAS GIFTS, SPY SOMETHING STREAKING ACROSS THE SNOW-FILLED SKY.
LOOK, DANNY--A SPACESHIP!
WOW! WE'D BETTER TELL DADDY!
6

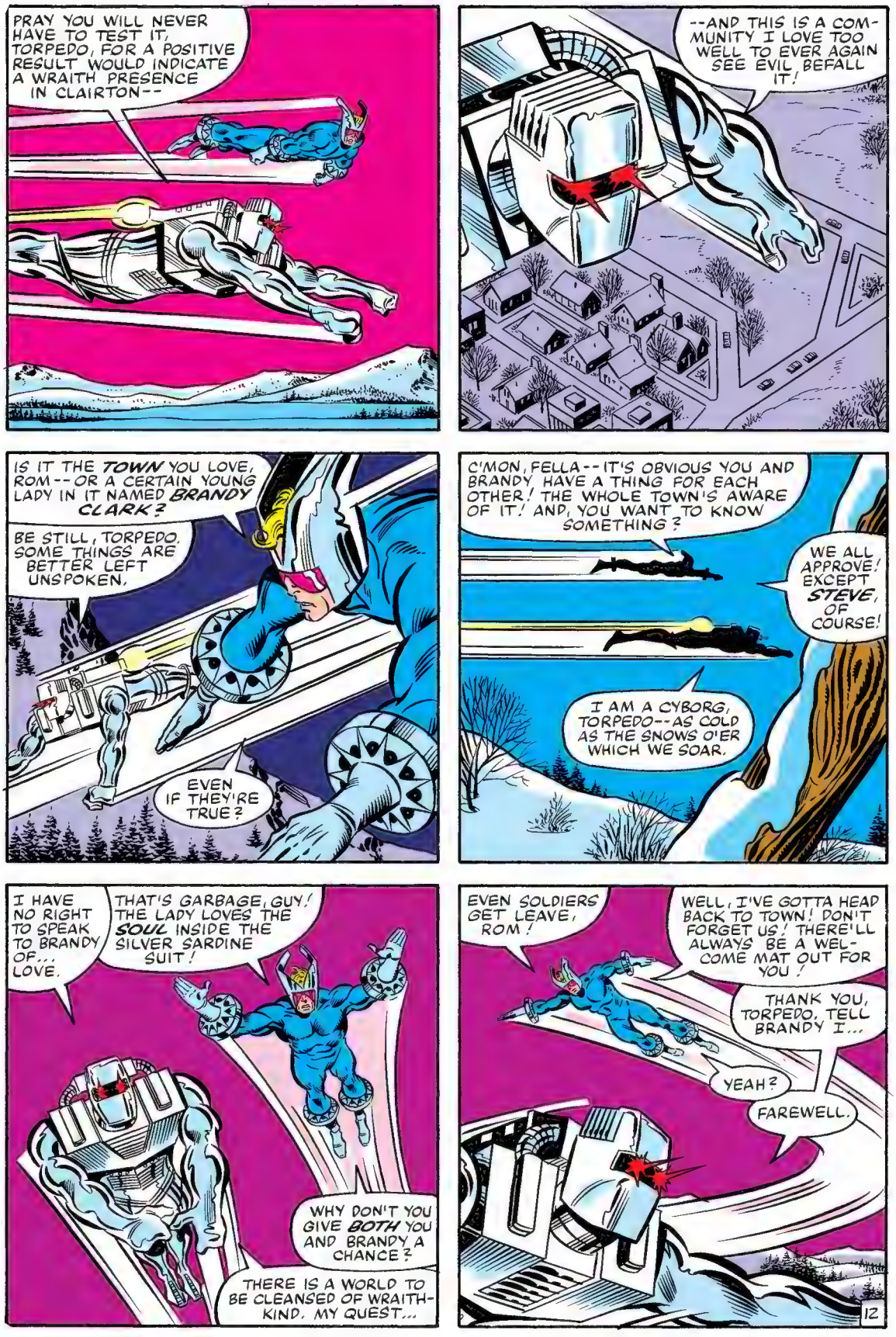

DADDY! DADDY! THERE'S A SPACE-SHIP OUT-SIDE!
UH-HUH! I KNEW IT WAS A MISTAKE TO LET YOU TWO OPEN YOUR PRESENTS EARLY!
THOSE TOY RAYGUNS HAVE FIRED YOUR IMAGINATIONS SO THAT YOU'LL NEVER SLEEP TONIGHT!
BUT, DADDY, THE SPACESHIP WAS REAL!
SURE IT WAS--AND SO WERE THE REINDEER PULLING IT AND THE JOLLY FAT PILOT AT THE CONTROLS! COME ON, YOU KIDS--YOU'VE GOT A BIG DAY AHEAD OF YOU!
D-DON'T :TEE-HEE: TICKLE, DADDY!
YES :TEE-HEE: TICKLE!
ALL RIGHT, YOU THREE--LITTLE NELL NEEDS TO GO TO BED!
AS JONATHAN AND SARAH CLARK SHOW THE JONESES OUT, STEVE AND ROM RESUME THEIR TALK...
THIS ISN'T EASY FOR ME, ROM--I WAS NEVER MUCH GOOD WITH WORDS.
I'M YOUR FRIEND. YEAH, I AM. I UNDERSTAND WHAT YOU'VE DONE FOR US--
--AND THAT WE, ALL OF US, OWE YOU OUR LIVES. I'M GRATEFUL.
BUT I LOVE BRANDY, ROM--ALWAYS HAVE. SHE LOVES ME, TOO--OR SHE DID. YOUR COMING CHANGED ALL THAT.
AT FIRST I FIGURED IT WAS THE DANGER, THE EXCITEMENT THAT CHANGED HER--THEN I REALIZED IT WAS YOU.
SOMEHOW SHE'S GOTTEN IT INTO HER HEAD THAT SHE LOVES YOU--METAL BODY-SUIT, PENLIGHT EYES, AND ALL.
SO, EVEN THOUGH I'M YOUR FRIEND, I'M GLAD YOU'RE GOING. I WANT BRANDY BACK. SEEYA, ROM. MERRY CHRISTMAS.
THE DOOR TO THE CELLAR CLOSES BEHIND STEVE JACKSON, ROM, SPACEKNIGHT, IS ALONE WITH HIS THOUGHTS... AND THE GHOST OF HIS OWN HUMANITY.
STEVE IS RIGHT. I DO LOVE BRANDY CLARK.
TELL HER. YOU DESERVE HAPPINESS. YOU HAVE WON THE RIGHT.
I CANNOT. I AM A CYBORG. A MACHINE.
YOU ARE A MAN. YOU HAVE A HEART THAT IS NOW BREAKING.
HALF OF MY HUMANITY PERISHED WITH TERMINATOR ON GALADOR. I CAN NEVER RECLAIM IT.*
*ROM #26--AL.
GODS OF THE GOLDEN GALAXY, WILL I NEVER BE HUMAN AGAIN?!
IF ANY UPSTAIRS HEAR THE LONELY SPACEKNIGHT'S CRY, THEY HONOR HIM BY LEAVING HIM IN PEACE.
7


IF YOU RECOGNIZE THE MONUMENT, WE DONT NEED TO TELL YOU THE NAME OF THE TOWN...
...SO WE'LL CONCENTRATE ON EXPLAINING WHY THIS MAN, MACK KILLBURN--
--IS FLEEING FOR HIS LIFE ALONG THE STREET'S OF THE NATION'S CAPITOL...
...FROM A FLOCK OF BIRDS.
RAVENS! BIGGER, BLACKER THAN ANY BIRDS I'VE EVER SEEN BEFORE! I NOTICED 'EM FOLLOWING ME THIS MORNING --CIRCLING ME, LIKE VULTURES ANTICIPATING DEATH!
MY DEATH!
MROWR
GODS! IT'S JUST A CAT!
BUT IS IT, OR IS IT ONE OF... THEM?!
A VOICE REACHES THE ALLEYWAY FROM THE STREET.
STAY WHERE YOU ARE, MR. KILLBURN. YOU CAN RUN NO FURTHER.
YOU'VE GIVEN US QUITE A RUN FOR OUR MONEY.
--BUT THE CHASE IS OVER.
BIRDS! CATS! DOGS! NONE OF 'EM REAL! ALL OF 'EM... THEM!
WH-WHO ARE YOU? WHAT DO YOU WANT OF ME?!
RRRRRRR
OH, COME NOW, MR. KILLBURN-- YOU KNOW WHO WE ARE... WHAT WE ARE.
YOU'RE A REPORTER--A BETTER ONE THAN YOU KNOW. YOU STUMBLED ONTO THE STORY OF ROM, AND THAT OPENED UP A WHOLE CAN OF ...WORMS... WHICH WOULD HAVE BEEN BETTER LEFT SHUT.
8

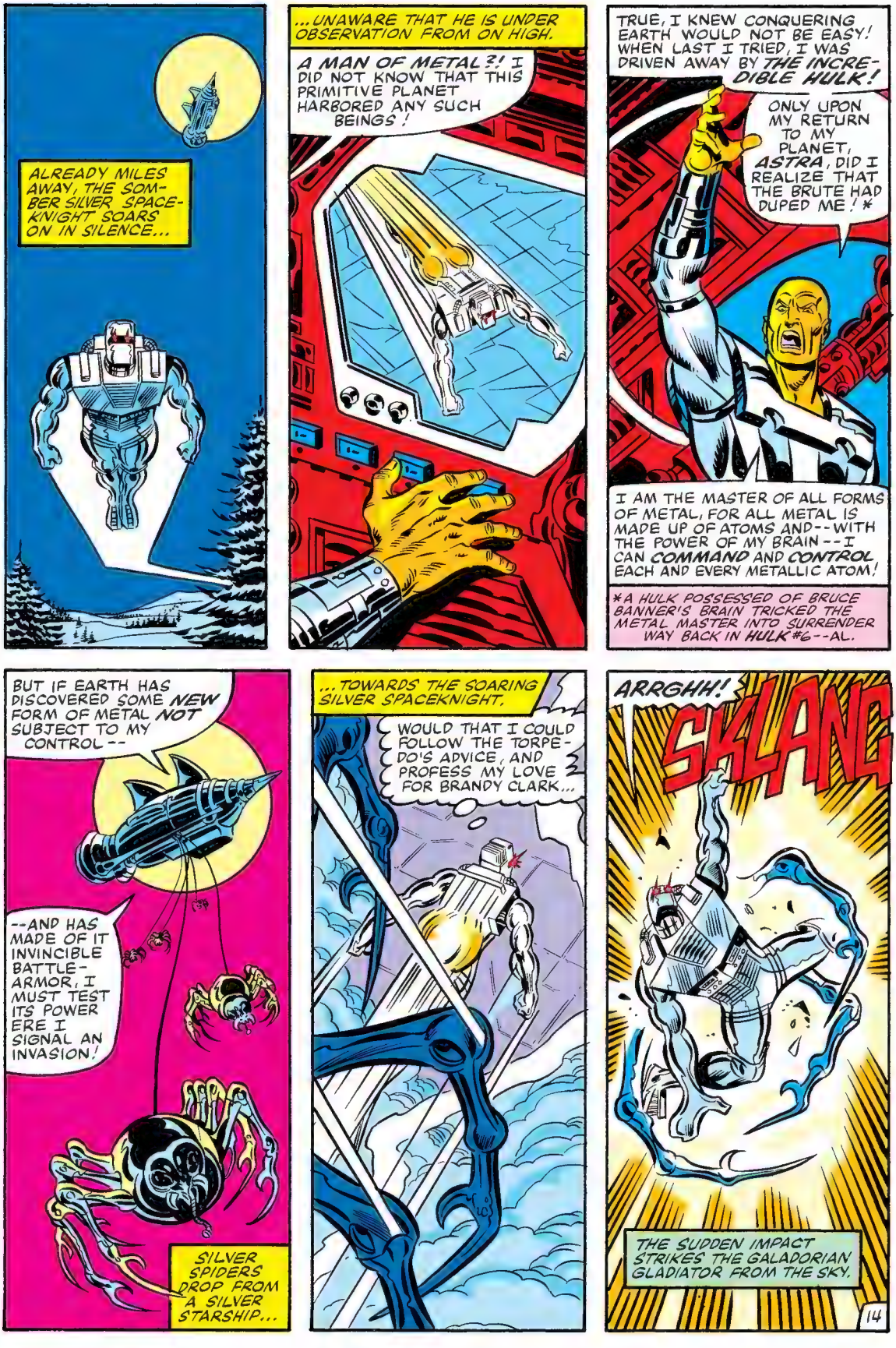

I'M ARMED! I WARN YOU, I'LL SHOOT! MY GOD, THE DOGS ...THEY'RE CHANGING!!
INTO HELLHOUNDS OF THE DARK NEBULA, MR. KILLBURN, TELEPATHIC TRACKERS. A SAMPLE OF WHAT OUR SCIENCE AND SORCERY CAN DO, GIVEN THE PROPER MATERIALS.
IN THIS CASE, ONCE-ORDINARY EARTH-DOGS!
TAKE HIM, MY PETS!
NO!
BLAM
BLAM
BLAM
ONE HELLHOUND BECOMES INTANGIBLE BEFORE KILLBURN'S BULLET CAN HARM IT. THE OTHER SCREAMS...
SKREEEE
...AND TURNS TO MALODOROUS ASH.
CURSE YOU, MR. KILLBURN.
THESE DOGS TAKE TIME TO BREED.
AARRRROOOOO
OOOOOOOO
WHAT THE--?!
SOUNDS LIKE SOMETHING OUT OF "THE HOUND OF THE BASKERVILLES!"
ONLY THIS ISN'T THE ENGLISH MOORS-- IT'S WASHINGTON, D.C.!
THE POLICEMAN ROUNDS THE CORNER OF THE ALLEYWAY NOT KNOWING WHAT HE'LL FIND, BUT CERTAINLY NOT EXPECTING...
9

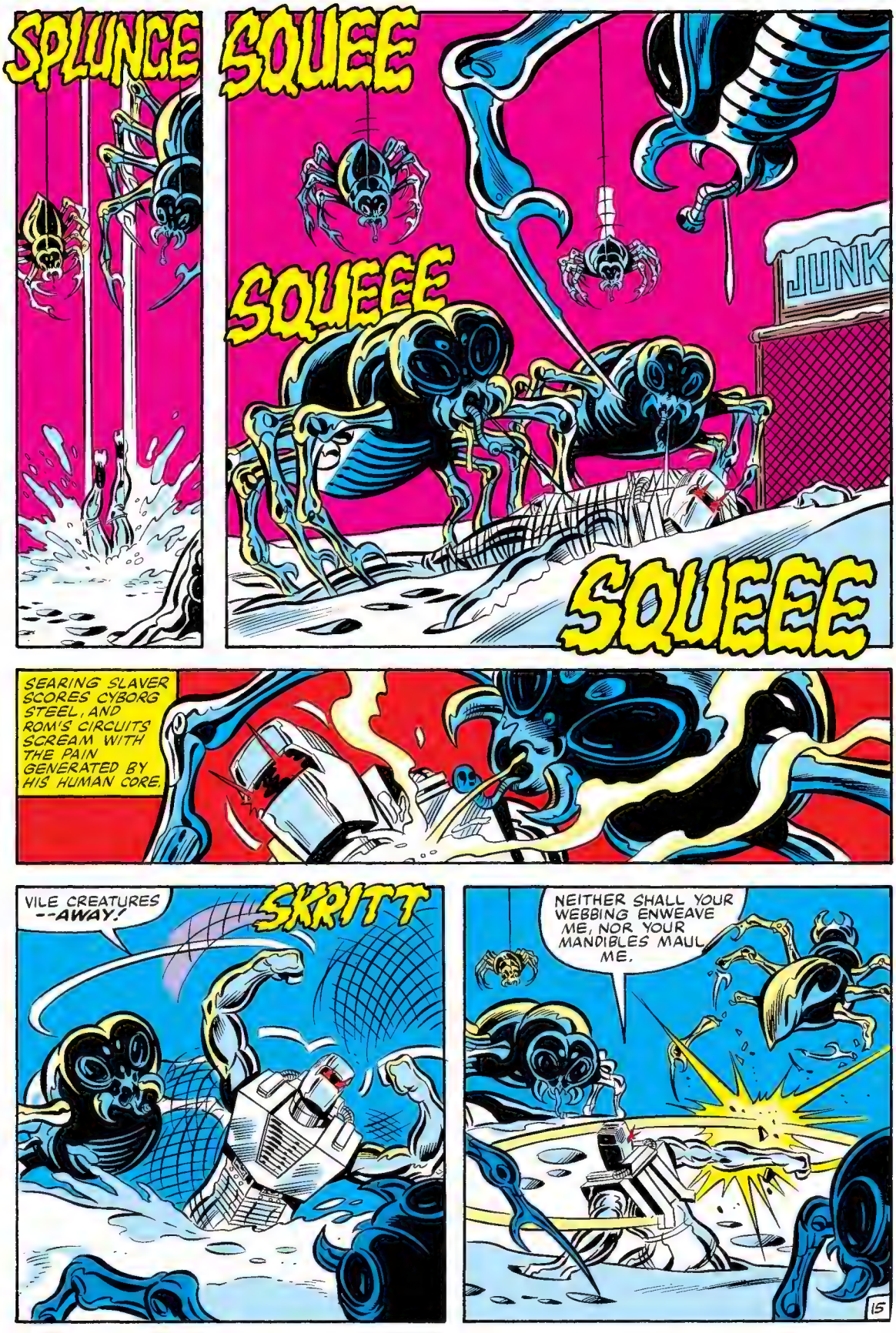
...HORROR!
ANOTHER HUMAN! CAN NONE OF YOUR ACCURSED KIND MIND YOUR OWN BUSINESS?
MUST WE BE FORCED TO ERADICATE ALL OF YOU TO KEEP OUR PRESENCE ON YOUR PLANET A SECRET?
I--I--I--I...
...AIIEEEE!
HSSSS
I KILLED A HELLHOUND, SO I KNOW THESE DOGS CAN DIE-- BUT WHAT ABOUT THEIR MASTER?
KPOW
CHSSSS!
AND IT WASN'T EVEN A SILVER BULLET!
ONE GOOD TURN, MY FRIEND...!
AWRODOOO
BLAM
OH, MAN, HOW AM I GONNA REPORT THIS?
YOU'RE NOT. NO ONE WILL BELIEVE YOU, I KNOW, I'VE TRIED.
WAIT A MINUTE! WHAT DO YOU MEAN, NO ONE WILL BELIEVE--?!
THESE PILES OF ASH WILL DISAPPEAR-- THEY'LL NEVER BE ANALYZED IN ANY LAB.
IF YOU PRESS THE ISSUE, YOU'LL BE TRANSFERRED, OR FIRED. SOON YOU'LL NOTICE PEOPLE AROUND YOU ACTING STRANGE, AND THAT YOU'RE BEING FOLLOWED.
10


THAT'S WHAT HAPPENED TO ME. I'M A REPORTER. I THOUGHT I WAS ON TO THE SCOOP OF THE CENTURY--A SILVER SPACEMAN CAME TO EARTH TO MURDER HUMAN BEINGS!
ONLY THE MORE I DUG, THE MORE I LEARNED THAT THE "PEOPLE" *ROM* WAS KILLING WEREN'T PEOPLE AT ALL!
THEY WERE EVIL ALIENS, *DIRE WRAITHS*, ABLE TO TAKE ON ANY SHAPE--LOOK LIKE ANY LIVING THING. AND THEY WERE OUT TO CONQUER EARTH!
ROM? EVIL ALIENS? AM I SUPPOSED TO *BELIEVE* THIS?!
YOU *SAW* WHAT WE WERE UP AGAINST TONIGHT!
YEAH... I SAW! *HEY*, WHERE ARE YOU GOING?
TO FIND THE ONE BEING CAPABLE OF SAVING ME... AND THE EARTH...
ROM
SPACEKNIGHT
DO YOU NOT WISH TO BE WITH YOUR FAMILY ON THIS CHRISTMAS EVE, TORPEDO?
LORRY'S PUTTING THE KIDS TO BED, ROM! BESIDES, I FEEL LIKE A KID MYSELF!
I CAN'T WAIT TO TEST OUT MY CHRISTMAS PRESENT-- MY NEW *WRAITH-DETECTOR VISION!*
11

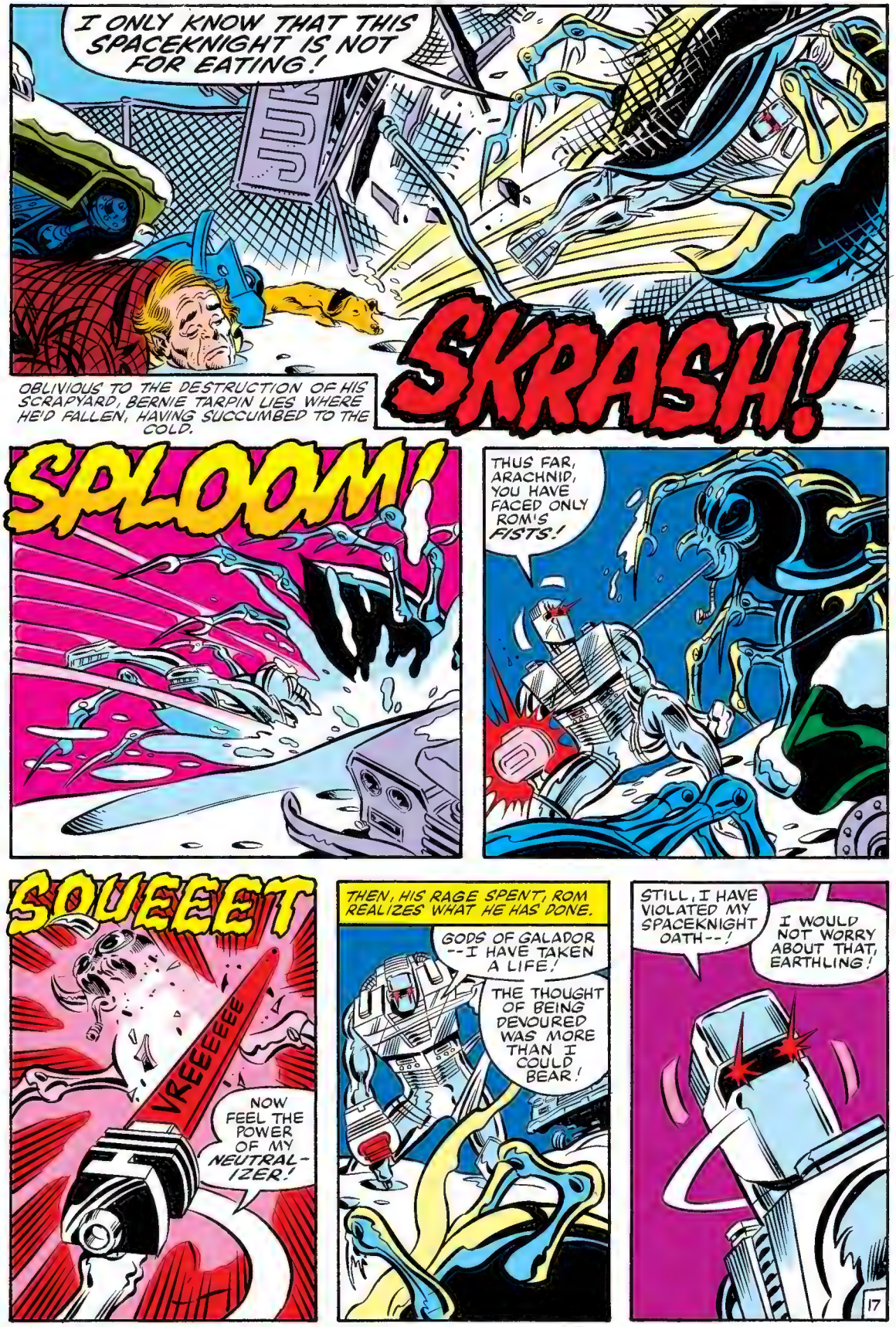

PRAY YOU WILL NEVER HAVE TO TEST IT, TORPEDO, FOR A POSITIVE RESULT WOULD INDICATE A WRAITH PRESENCE IN CLAIRTON--
--AND THIS IS A COMMUNITY I LOVE TOO WELL TO EVER AGAIN SEE EVIL BEFALL IT!
IS IT THE TOWN YOU LOVE, ROM--OR A CERTAIN YOUNG LADY IN IT NAMED BRANDY CLARK?
BE STILL, TORPEDO. SOME THINGS ARE BETTER LEFT UNSPOKEN.
EVEN IF THEY'RE TRUE?
C'MON, FELLA--IT'S OBVIOUS YOU AND BRANDY HAVE A THING FOR EACH OTHER! THE WHOLE TOWN'S AWARE OF IT! AND, YOU WANT TO KNOW SOMETHING?
WE ALL APPROVE! EXCEPT STEVE, OF COURSE!
I AM A CYBORG, TORPEDO--AS COLD AS THE SNOWS O'ER WHICH WE SOAR.
I HAVE NO RIGHT TO SPEAK TO BRANDY OF... LOVE.
THAT'S GARBAGE, GUY! THE LADY LOVES THE SOUL INSIDE THE SILVER SARDINE SUIT!
WHY DON'T YOU GIVE BOTH YOU AND BRANDY A CHANCE?
THERE IS A WORLD TO BE CLEANSED OF WRAITH-KIND. MY QUEST...
EVEN SOLDIERS GET LEAVE, ROM!
WELL, I'VE GOTTA HEAD BACK TO TOWN! DON'T FORGET US! THERE'LL ALWAYS BE A WELCOME MAT OUT FOR YOU!
THANK YOU, TORPEDO. TELL BRANDY I...
YEAH?
FAREWELL.
12

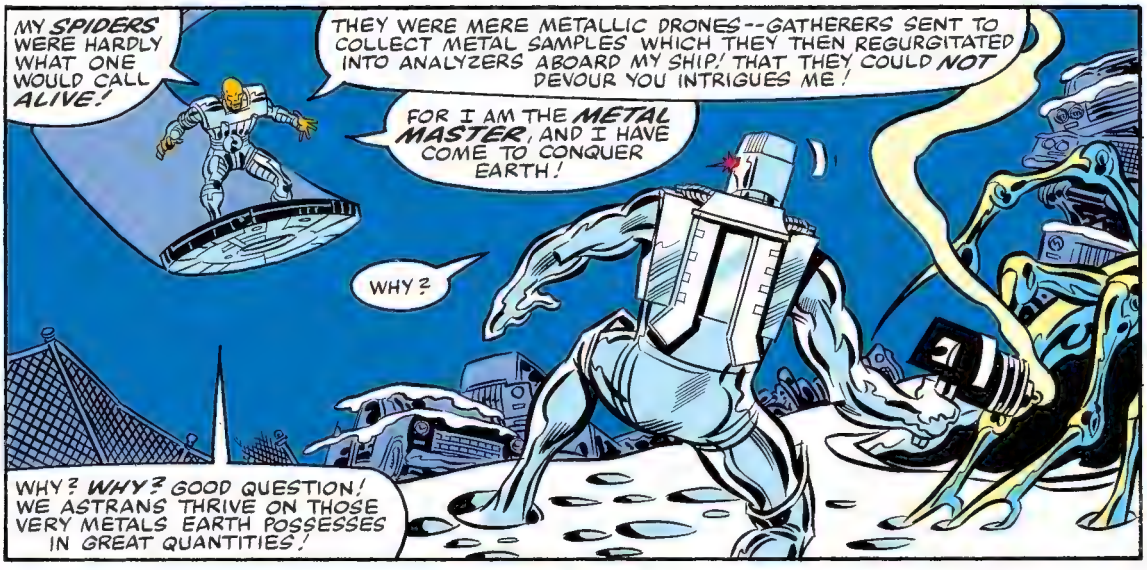
YOU BIG SILVER STIFF!
EASE UP! LEARN TO BEND BEFORE YOU BREAK!
IF THIS WRAITH WAR COSTS US OUR HUMANITY--
--THEN MAYBE IT'S NOT WORTH WINNING! HEY! WHAT'S THAT DOWN THERE? A FARM?
OH, YEAH! THE OLD MARK'S PLACE!
I'D HEARD IT WAS ABANDONED-- NOT SURE WHY, THOUGH! MAYBE I SHOULD CHECK OUT THE PRICE? LORRY'S ALWAYS WANTED A FARM...
HEY, IS MY NEW VISOR PLAYING TRICKS ON ME--
--OR IS THERE SOMETHING SHIMMERING IN THE AIR BESIDE THAT OLD RUIN OF A FIREPLACE? I'D BETTER CHECK IT OUT!
AFTER ALL, THAT'S WHAT HEROES ARE FOR!
THE TORPEDO SKIMS IN LOW OVER THE SNOW.
HE HAD HOPED TO CHECK OUT HIS NEW WRAITH DETECTOR VISOR THIS CHRISTMAS EVE.
HEAVEN HELP HIM, HE WILL HAVE HIS CHANCE!
13


ALREADY MILES AWAY, THE SOMBER SILVER SPACE-KNIGHT SOARS ON IN SILENCE...
...UNAWARE THAT HE IS UNDER OBSERVATION FROM ON HIGH.
A MAN OF METAL?! I DID NOT KNOW THAT THIS PRIMITIVE PLANET HARBORED ANY SUCH BEINGS!
TRUE, I KNEW CONQUERING EARTH WOULD NOT BE EASY! WHEN LAST I TRIED, I WAS DRIVEN AWAY BY THE INCREDIBLE HULK!
ONLY UPON MY RETURN TO MY PLANET, ASTRA, DID I REALIZE THAT THE BRUTE HAD DUPED ME!*
I AM THE MASTER OF ALL FORMS OF METAL, FOR ALL METAL IS MADE UP OF ATOMS AND--WITH THE POWER OF MY BRAIN--I CAN COMMAND AND CONTROL EACH AND EVERY METALLIC ATOM!
*A HULK POSSESSED OF BRUCE BANNER'S BRAIN TRICKED THE METAL MASTER INTO SURRENDER WAY BACK IN HULK #6--AL.
BUT IF EARTH HAS DISCOVERED SOME NEW FORM OF METAL NOT SUBJECT TO MY CONTROL--
--AND HAS MADE OF IT INVINCIBLE BATTLE-ARMOR, I MUST TEST ITS POWER ERE I SIGNAL AN INVASION!
SILVER SPIDERS DROP FROM A SILVER STARSHIP...
...TOWARDS THE SOARING SILVER SPACEKNIGHT.
WOULD THAT I COULD FOLLOW THE TORPEDO'S ADVICE, AND PROFESS MY LOVE FOR BRANDY CLARK...
ARRGHH!
SKLANG
THE SUDDEN IMPACT STRIKES THE GALADORIAN GLADIATOR FROM THE SKY.
14


SPLUNGE
SQUEE
SQUEEE
JUNK
SQUEEE
SEARING SLAVER SCORES CYBORG STEEL, AND ROM'S CIRCUITS SCREAM WITH THE PAIN GENERATED BY HIS HUMAN CORE.
VILE CREATURES --AWAY!
SKRITT
NEITHER SHALL YOUR WEBBING ENWEAVE ME, NOR YOUR MANDIBLES MAUL ME.
15

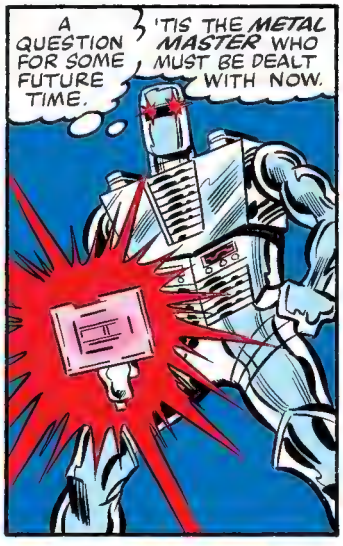
I AM ROM, SPACEKNIGHT, AND I AM FODDER FOR NO FOUL CREATURE. UNNGH!
BRAVE WORDS...
JUNK
WHILE, WATCHING FROM ABOVE...
THE EARTHLINGS ARE MORE ADVANCED THAN I HAD IMAGINED!
THAT EARTH-FORGED ARMOR RESISTS MY DEVOURING PETS!
HAH! THE EARTHLINGS MAY HAVE ENGINEERED THE MEANS OF THEIR OWN DESTRUCTION!
I COMMAND ALL FORMS OF METAL! IF INDEED I CAN TAKE CONTROL OF THEIR INVINCIBLE BATTLE-ARMOR, I CAN TURN THEIR OWN WEAPONS BACK AGAINST THEM!
NO INVASION NEED EVER BE SIGNALLED! NO ASTRAN NEED EVER ENTER THE BATTLE!
I WILL CONQUER EARTH SINGLE-HANDEDLY, AND BE PROCLAIMED MY PLANET'S GREATEST HERO!
AND, BELOW...
SQUEE
SHHSSSS
ARRHH!
SHROOM!
I KNOW NOT WHICH IS WORSE--YOUR FETID TOUCH, OR WHATEVER FOUL PURPOSE LIES BEHIND IT!
16

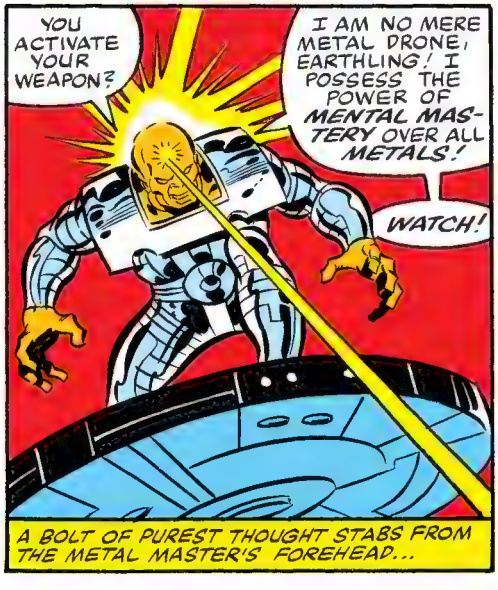

I ONLY KNOW THAT THIS SPACEKNIGHT IS NOT FOR EATING!
JUNK
SKRASH!
OBLIVIOUS TO THE DESTRUCTION OF HIS SCRAPYARD, BERNIE TARPIN LIES WHERE HE'D FALLEN, HAVING SUCCUMBED TO THE COLD.
SPLOOM!
THUS FAR, ARACHNID, YOU HAVE FACED ONLY ROM'S FISTS!
SQUEEET
VREEEEEE
NOW FEEL THE POWER OF MY NEUTRAL-IZER!
THEN, HIS RAGE SPENT, ROM REALIZES WHAT HE HAS DONE.
GODS OF GALADOR --I HAVE TAKEN A LIFE!
THE THOUGHT OF BEING DEVOURED WAS MORE THAN I COULD BEAR!
STILL, I HAVE VIOLATED MY SPACEKNIGHT OATH--!
I WOULD NOT WORRY ABOUT THAT, EARTHLING!
17

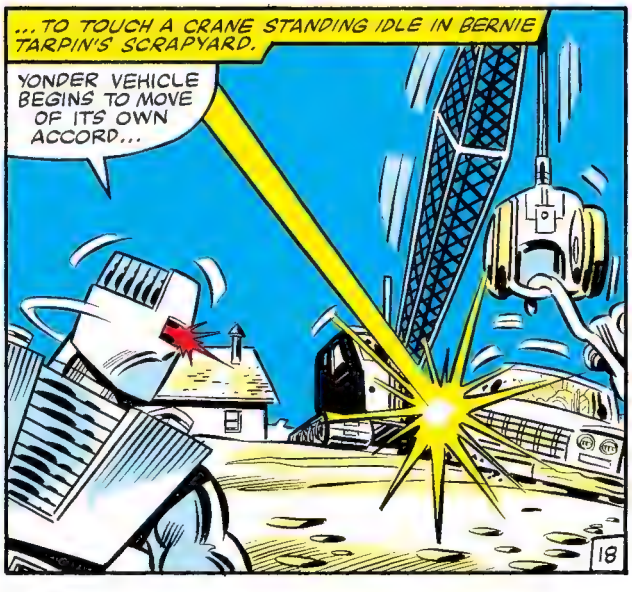

MY SPIDERS WERE HARDLY WHAT ONE WOULD CALL ALIVE!
THEY WERE MERE METALLIC DRONES--GATHERERS SENT TO COLLECT METAL SAMPLES WHICH THEY THEN REGURGITATED INTO ANALYZERS ABOARD MY SHIP! THAT THEY COULD NOT DEVOUR YOU INTRIGUES ME!
FOR I AM THE METAL MASTER, AND I HAVE COME TO CONQUER EARTH!
WHY?
WHY? WHY? GOOD QUESTION! WE ASTRANS THRIVE ON THOSE VERY METALS EARTH POSSESSES IN GREAT QUANTITIES!

"I CAME TO PROCURE THEM ONCE BEFORE, ONLY TO BE DRIVEN OFF BY THE HULK!
"TO SAVE FACE, I HAVE RETURNED TO CONQUER ANEW!"

THE HULK AGAIN! WHEN LAST I HEARD THAT NAME, IT WAS SYNONOMOUS WITH "VILLAIN"*--NOW I HEAR THE MONSTER SPOKEN OF AS "HERO!" WILL I EVER MEET THIS HULK?
*LAST ISH--AL.

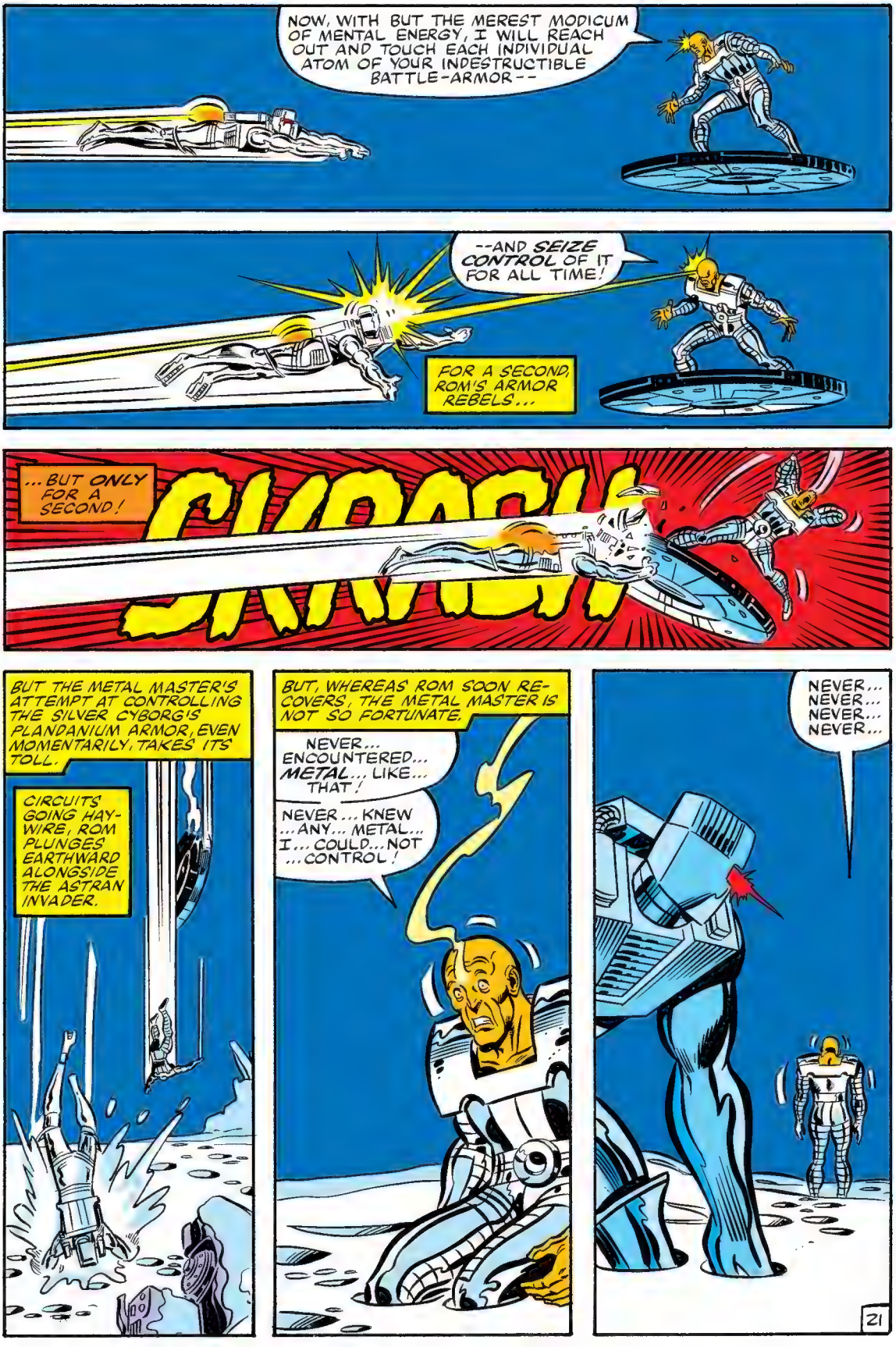

A QUESTION FOR SOME FUTURE TIME.
'TIS THE METAL MASTER WHO MUST BE DEALT WITH NOW.

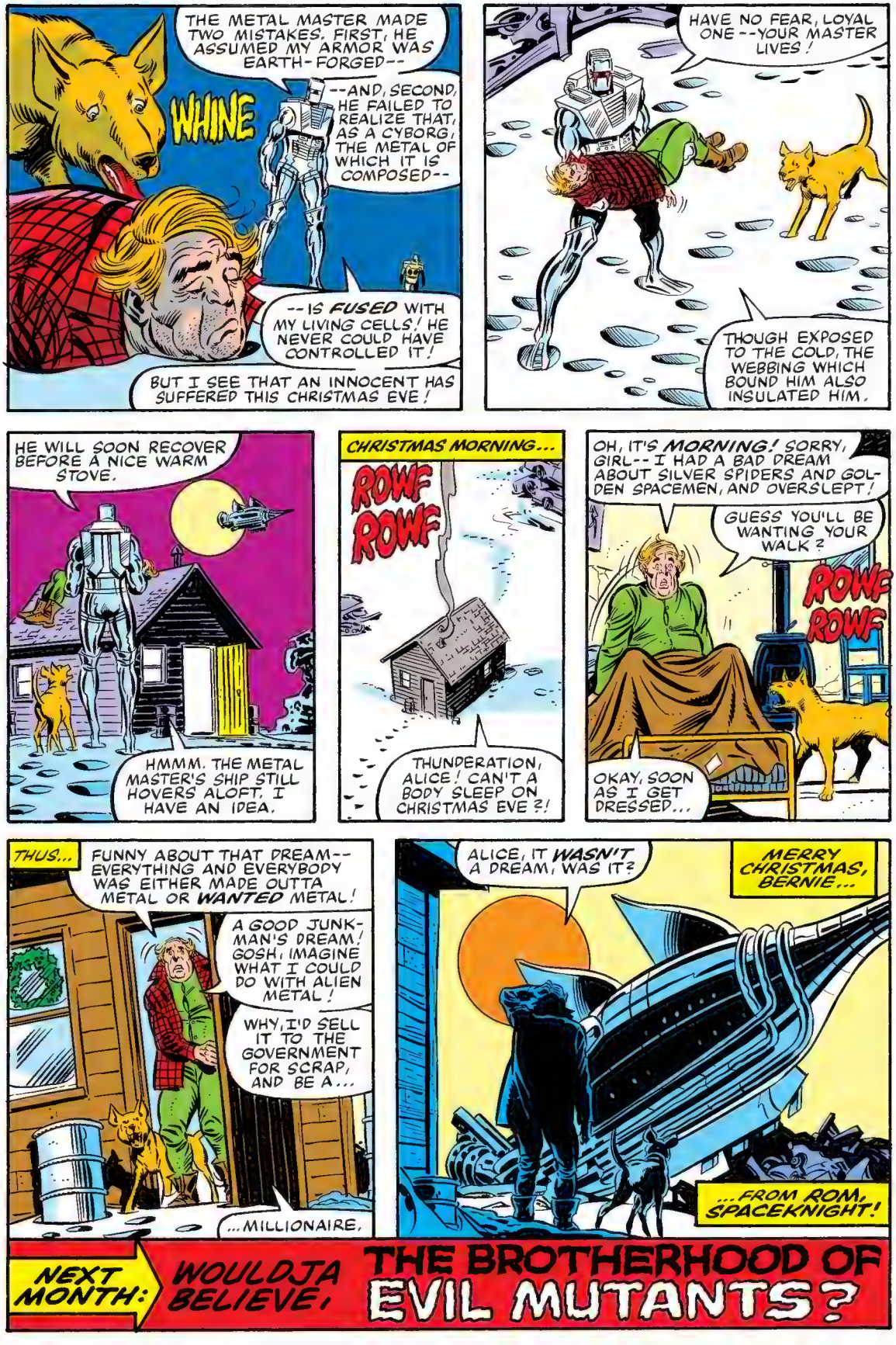

YOU ACTIVATE YOUR WEAPON?
I AM NO MERE METAL DRONE, EARTHLING! I POSSESS THE POWER OF MENTAL MASTERY OVER ALL METALS!
WATCH!
A BOLT OF PUREST THOUGHT STABS FROM THE METAL MASTER'S FOREHEAD...


...TO TOUCH A CRANE STANDING IDLE IN BERNIE TARPIN'S SCRAPYARD.
YONDER VEHICLE BEGINS TO MOVE OF ITS OWN ACCORD...
18

--TO TRANSFORM INTO A MACHINE MOST MALEVOLENT!
SKLANG!
SHVROOM!
YOU DISAPPOINT ME, WARRIOR-- OR, RATHER, YOUR ARMOR DOES!
IF IT CAN BE SO EASILY DEFEATED, IT POSSESSES NOT THE INVINCIBILITY THE METAL MASTER HAD HOPED TO TURN AGAINST ITS MAKERS!
IT IS ONLY MORE METAL TO BE DELIVERED AS SCRAP TO WAITING ASTRA!
19

IN THAT YOU ARE WRONG, METAL MASTER!
THE CYBORG ARMOR OF A SPACEKNIGHT IS THE FINEST ARMOR EVER FORGED!
SHR RAK!
GOOD! EVEN BETTER THAN I'D DARED TO DREAM!
BUT ONE FURTHER TEST, EARTHLING, BEFORE I TAKE CONTROL OF YOUR ARMOR AWAY FROM YOU!
ANOTHER BOLT OF THOUGHT, AND AGAIN THE SCRAP TRANS-FIGURES.
TENTACLES OF STEEL!
YOU WEAR MY PATIENCE THIN, METAL MASTER!
THERE IS A GREATER DANGER TO EARTH THAN THAT POSED BY YOU--
--AND IT IS ROM'S MISSION TO DEAL WITH IT!
THE TEST IS DONE, EARTHLING! YOUR ARMOR HAS PASSED!
20


NOW, WITH BUT THE MEREST MODICUM OF MENTAL ENERGY, I WILL REACH OUT AND TOUCH EACH INDIVIDUAL ATOM OF YOUR INDESTRUCTIBLE BATTLE-ARMOR--
--AND SEIZE CONTROL OF IT FOR ALL TIME!
FOR A SECOND, ROM'S ARMOR REBELS...
...BUT ONLY FOR A SECOND!
BUT THE METAL MASTER'S ATTEMPT AT CONTROLLING THE SILVER CYBORG'S PLANDANIUM ARMOR, EVEN MOMENTARILY, TAKES ITS TOLL.
CIRCUITS GOING HAYWIRE, ROM PLUNGES EARTHWARD ALONGSIDE THE ASTRAN INVADER.
BUT, WHEREAS ROM SOON RECOVERS, THE METAL MASTER IS NOT SO FORTUNATE.
NEVER... ENCOUNTERED... METAL... LIKE... THAT!
NEVER... KNEW ...ANY... METAL... I... COULD... NOT ...CONTROL!
NEVER... NEVER... NEVER... NEVER...
21


THE METAL MASTER MADE TWO MISTAKES. FIRST, HE ASSUMED MY ARMOR WAS EARTH-FORGED--
WHINE
--AND, SECOND, HE FAILED TO REALIZE THAT, AS A CYBORG, THE METAL OF WHICH IT IS COMPOSED--
--IS FUSED WITH MY LIVING CELLS! HE NEVER COULD HAVE CONTROLLED IT!
BUT I SEE THAT AN INNOCENT HAS SUFFERED THIS CHRISTMAS EVE!
HAVE NO FEAR, LOYAL ONE--YOUR MASTER LIVES!
THOUGH EXPOSED TO THE COLD, THE WEBBING WHICH BOUND HIM ALSO INSULATED HIM.
HE WILL SOON RECOVER BEFORE A NICE WARM STOVE.
HMMM. THE METAL MASTER'S SHIP STILL HOVERS ALOFT. I HAVE AN IDEA.
CHRISTMAS MORNING...
ROWF ROWF
THUNDERATION, ALICE! CAN'T A BODY SLEEP ON CHRISTMAS EVE?!
OH, IT'S MORNING! SORRY, GIRL--I HAD A BAD DREAM ABOUT SILVER SPIDERS AND GOLDEN SPACEMEN, AND OVERSLEPT!
GUESS YOU'LL BE WANTING YOUR WALK?
ROWF ROWF
OKAY, SOON AS I GET DRESSED...
THUS...
FUNNY ABOUT THAT DREAM--EVERYTHING AND EVERYBODY WAS EITHER MADE OUTTA METAL OR WANTED METAL!
A GOOD JUNKMAN'S DREAM! GOSH, IMAGINE WHAT I COULD DO WITH ALIEN METAL!
WHY, I'D SELL IT TO THE GOVERNMENT FOR SCRAP, AND BE A...
...MILLIONAIRE.
ALICE, IT WASN'T A DREAM, WAS IT?
MERRY CHRISTMAS, BERNIE...
...FROM ROM, SPACEKNIGHT!
NEXT MONTH: WOULDJA BELIEVE, THE BROTHERHOOD OF EVIL MUTANTS?

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SPACEKNIGHT
BATTLE WITH THE BROTHERHOOD!
MILGROM

Two-hundred years ago, the evil Dire Wraiths threatened the peace-loving planet, Galador. In their homeworld's darkest hour, a thousand brave, young Galadorians sacrificed humanity itself to become Cyborg Warriors, a last desperate line of defense. Though hopelessly outnumbered, these Spaceknights triumphed, and pursued the remnants of the Wraith horde across the universe. Now, alone in the Enemy's mightiest stronghold, on a backward planet called Earth, one Galadorian Warrior faces his most awesome challenge.

Stan Lee PRESENTS: THE GREATEST OF THE SPACEKNIGHTS--ROM!

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west virginia REEL

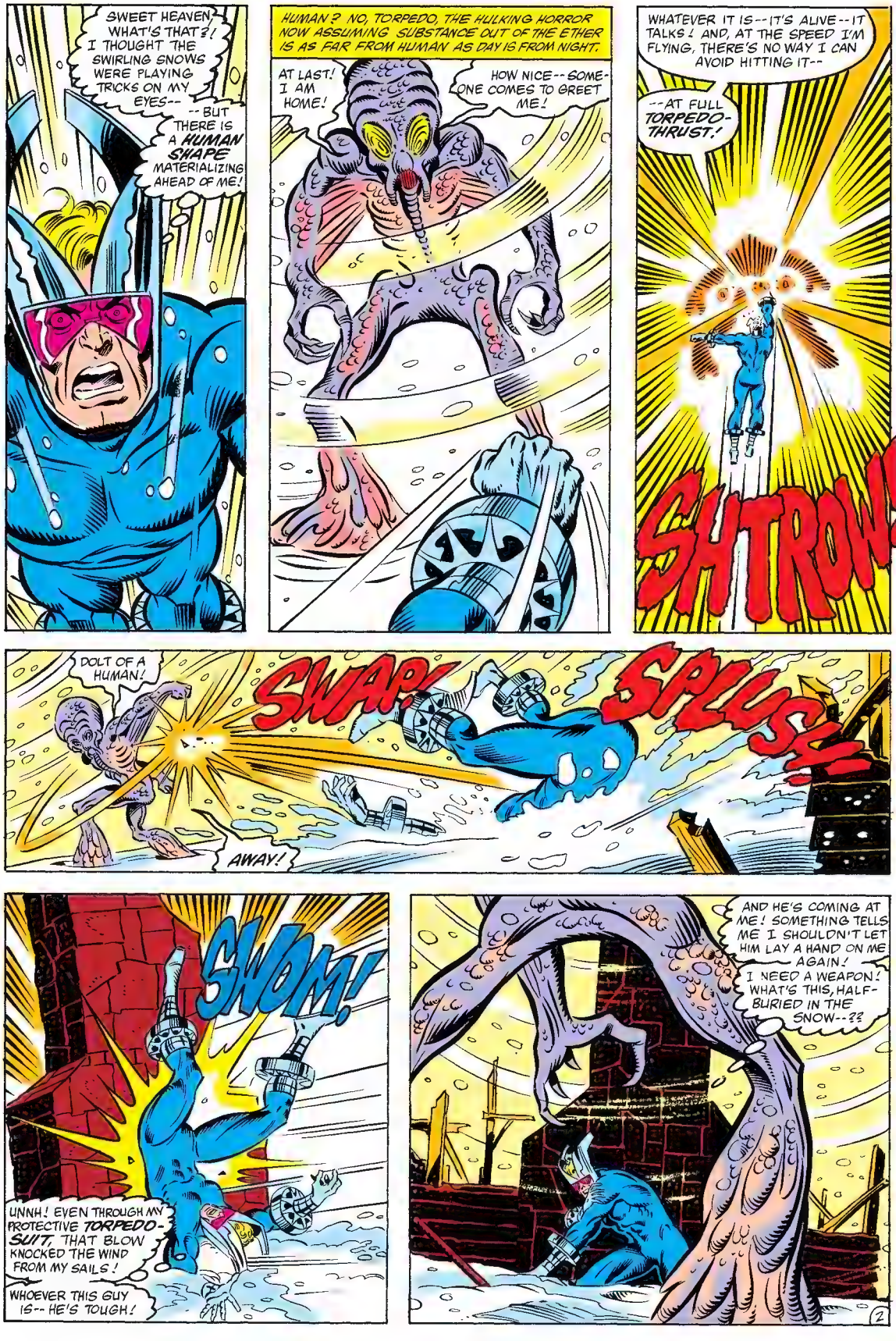
WHEN **ROM** DEPARTED FROM CLAIRTON TO CLEANSE THE REST OF EARTH OF **DIRE WRAITHS**, HE LEFT THE TITANIC **TORPEDO** TO SAFEGUARD THE TOWN HE HAD COME TO LOVE.

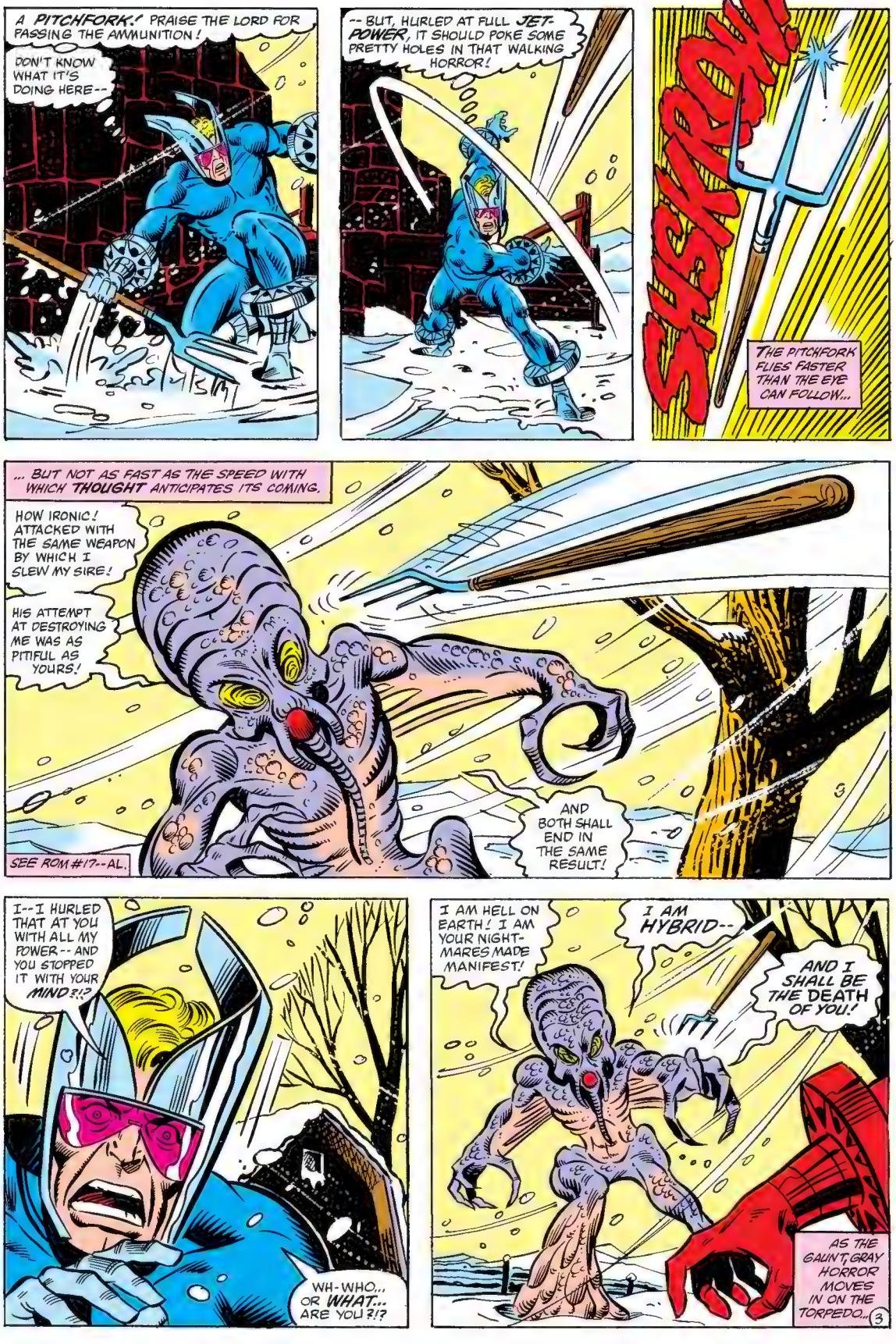
LIKE ANY OTHER HUMAN, THE TORPEDO POSSESSED NO POWER TO PENETRATE THE DIRE WRAITHS' HUMAN DISGUISE ...UNTIL **ROM** ENERGIZED HIS **TORPEDO-VISOR**.

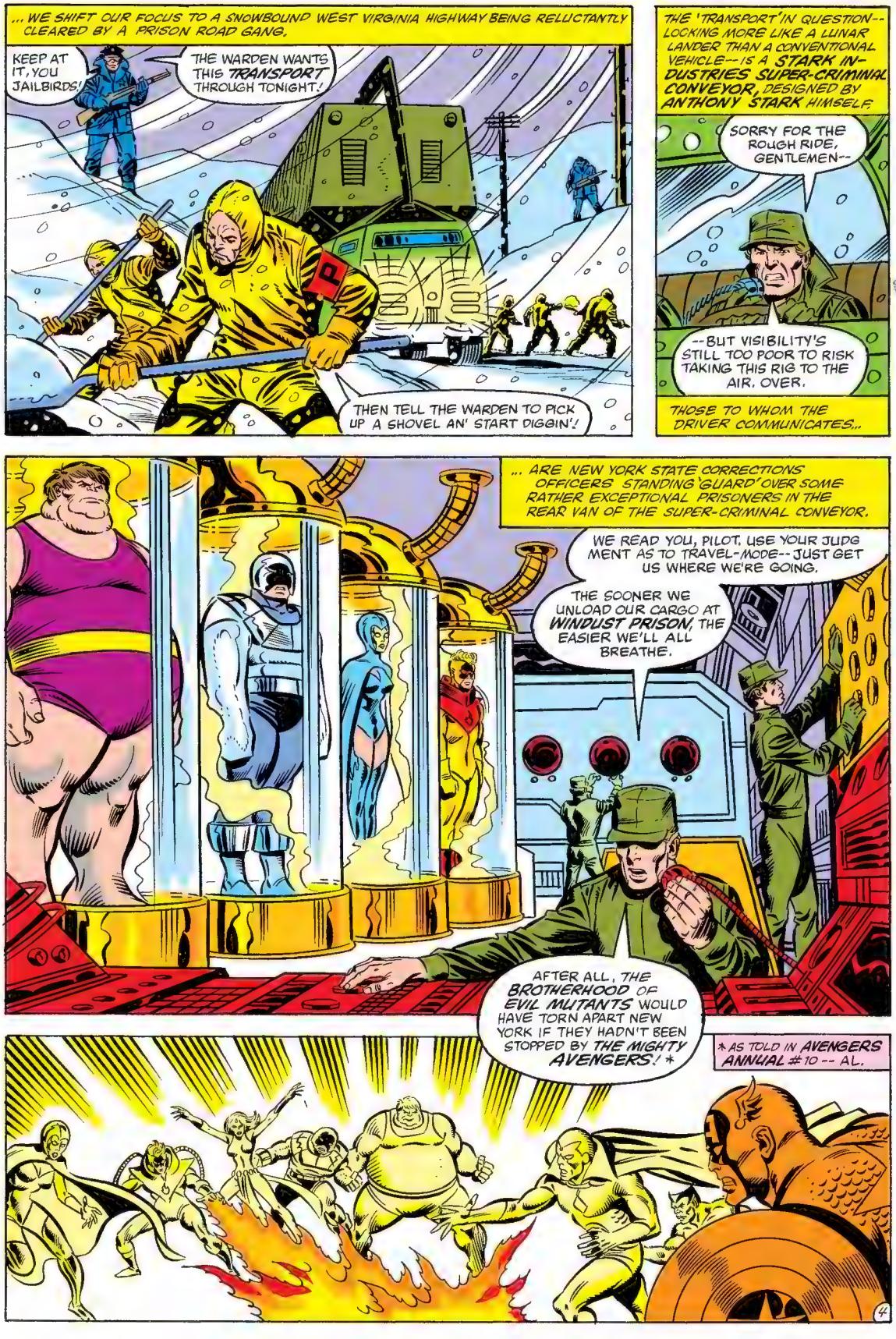
WHAT THE BLAZES--??

SOME KIND OF EERIE SHAPE MATERIALIZING OUT OF THE SNOW OVER THE RUINS OF THE OLD MARKS FARM?!

ON THIS DAY, AS **ROM** HAD WARNED, THE TORPEDO MAY DISCOVER THAT THE SPECIAL GIFT OF **SIGHT** BESTOWED UPON HIM WAS **NO GIFT** AT ALL.

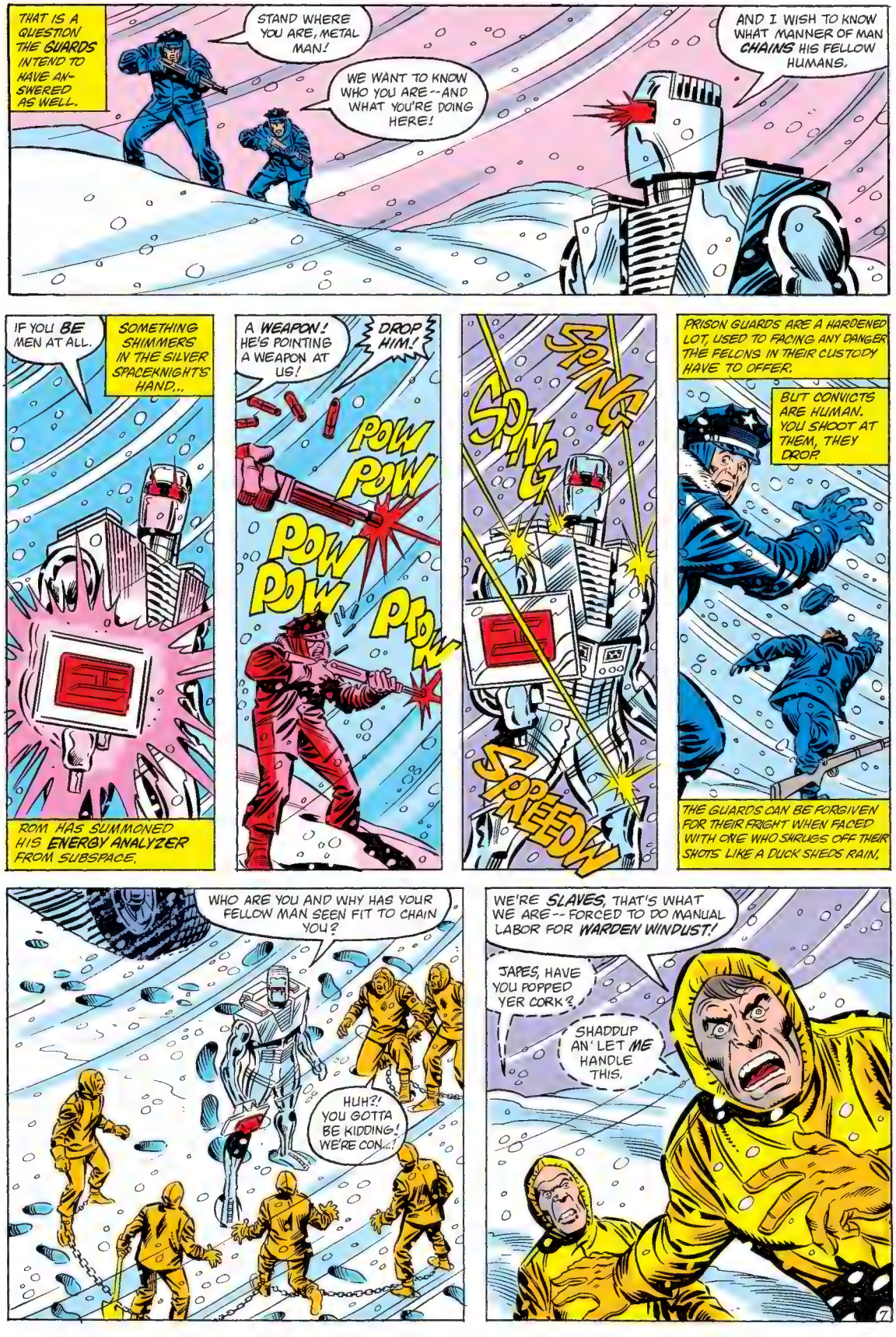

SWEET HEAVEN, WHAT'S THAT?! I THOUGHT THE SWIRLING SNOWS WERE PLAYING TRICKS ON MY EYES--
-- BUT THERE IS A HUMAN SHAPE MATERIALIZING AHEAD OF ME!
HUMAN? NO, TORPEDO, THE HULKING HORROR NOW ASSUMING SUBSTANCE OUT OF THE ETHER IS AS FAR FROM HUMAN AS DAY IS FROM NIGHT.
AT LAST! I AM HOME!
HOW NICE-- SOMEONE COMES TO GREET ME!
WHATEVER IT IS--IT'S ALIVE--IT TALKS! AND, AT THE SPEED I'M FLYING, THERE'S NO WAY I CAN AVOID HITTING IT--
--AT FULL TORPEDO-THRUST!
SHTROW!
DOLT OF A HUMAN!
SWAP!
SPLUSH!
AWAY!
SWOM!
UNNH! EVEN THROUGH MY PROTECTIVE TORPEDO-SUIT, THAT BLOW KNOCKED THE WIND FROM MY SAILS!
WHOEVER THIS GUY IS-- HE'S TOUGH!
AND HE'S COMING AT ME! SOMETHING TELLS ME I SHOULDN'T LET HIM LAY A HAND ON ME AGAIN!
I NEED A WEAPON! WHAT'S THIS, HALF-BURIED IN THE SNOW--??
2

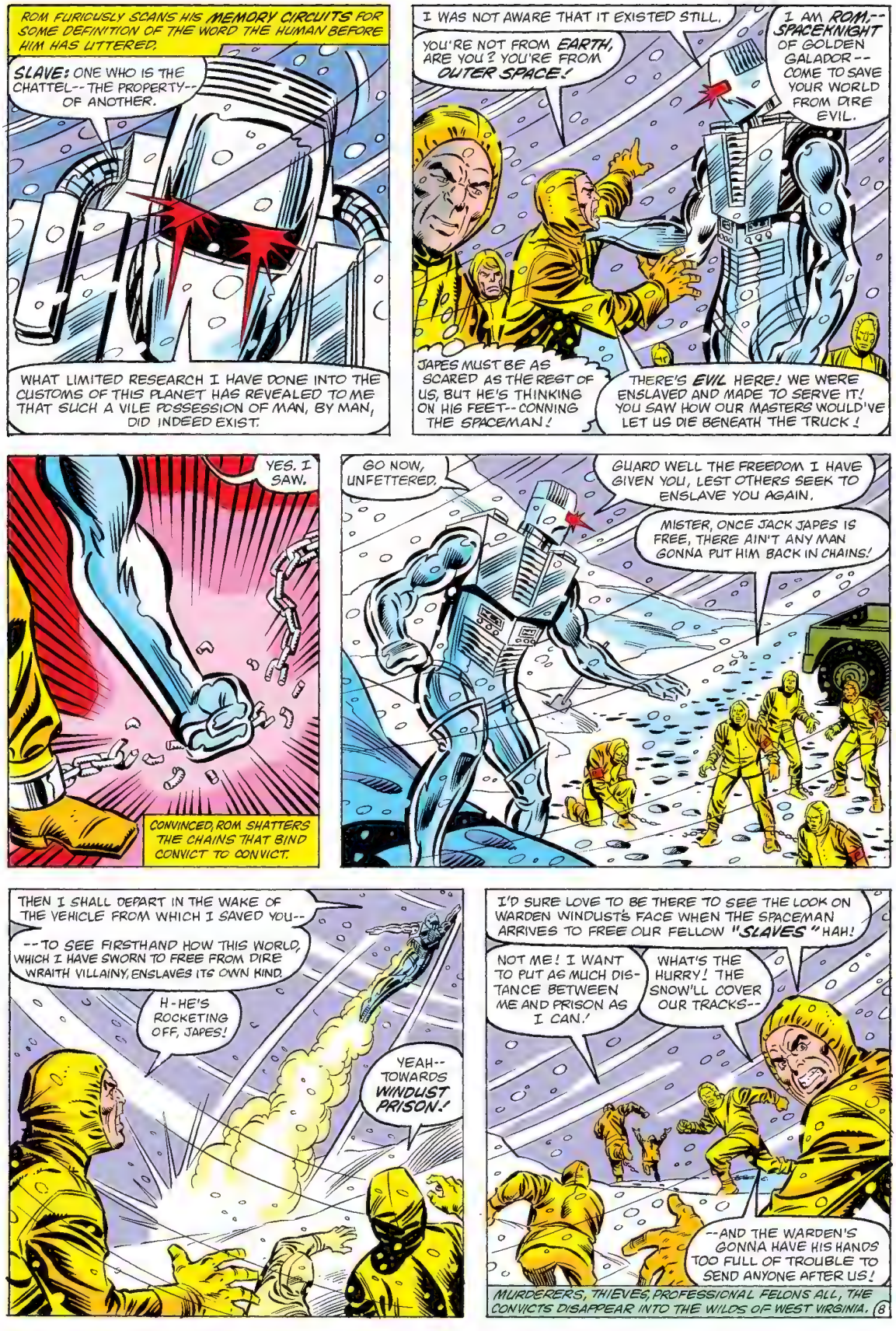

A PITCHFORK!? PRAISE THE LORD FOR PASSING THE AMMUNITION!
DON'T KNOW WHAT IT'S DOING HERE--
-- BUT, HURLED AT FULL JET-POWER, IT SHOULD POKE SOME PRETTY HOLES IN THAT WALKING HORROR!
SHSKROW
THE PITCHFORK FLIES FASTER THAN THE EYE CAN FOLLOW...
... BUT NOT AS FAST AS THE SPEED WITH WHICH THOUGHT ANTICIPATES ITS COMING.
HOW IRONIC! ATTACKED WITH THE SAME WEAPON BY WHICH I SLEW MY SIRE!
HIS ATTEMPT AT DESTROYING ME WAS AS PITIFUL AS YOURS!
AND BOTH SHALL END IN THE SAME RESULT!
SEE ROM #17--AL.
I--I HURLED THAT AT YOU WITH ALL MY POWER-- AND YOU STOPPED IT WITH YOUR MIND?!?
WH-WHO... OR WHAT... ARE YOU?!?
I AM HELL ON EARTH! I AM YOUR NIGHT-MARES MADE MANIFEST!
I AM HYBRID--
AND I SHALL BE THE DEATH OF YOU!
AS THE GALANT, GRAY HORROR MOVES IN ON THE TORPEDO...
3


... WE SHIFT OUR FOCUS TO A SNOWBOUND WEST VIRGINIA HIGHWAY BEING RELUCTANTLY CLEARED BY A PRISON ROAD GANG.
KEEP AT IT, YOU JAILBIRDS!
THE WARDEN WANTS THIS TRANSPORT THROUGH TONIGHT!
THEN TELL THE WARDEN TO PICK UP A SHOVEL AN' START DIGGIN'!
THE 'TRANSPORT' IN QUESTION--LOOKING MORE LIKE A LUNAR LANDER THAN A CONVENTIONAL VEHICLE--IS A STARK INDUSTRIES SUPER-CRIMINAL CONVEYOR, DESIGNED BY ANTHONY STARK HIMSELF.
SORRY FOR THE ROUGH RIDE, GENTLEMEN--
--BUT VISIBILITY'S STILL TOO POOR TO RISK TAKING THIS RIG TO THE AIR. OVER.
THOSE TO WHOM THE DRIVER COMMUNICATES...
... ARE NEW YORK STATE CORRECTIONS OFFICERS STANDING 'GUARD' OVER SOME RATHER EXCEPTIONAL PRISONERS IN THE REAR VAN OF THE SUPER-CRIMINAL CONVEYOR.
WE READ YOU, PILOT. USE YOUR JUDGMENT AS TO TRAVEL-MODE--JUST GET US WHERE WE'RE GOING.
THE SOONER WE UNLOAD OUR CARGO AT WINDUST PRISON, THE EASIER WE'LL ALL BREATHE.
AFTER ALL, THE BROTHERHOOD OF EVIL MUTANTS WOULD HAVE TORN APART NEW YORK IF THEY HADN'T BEEN STOPPED BY THE MIGHTY AVENGERS! *
* AS TOLD IN AVENGERS ANNUAL #10 -- AL.
4

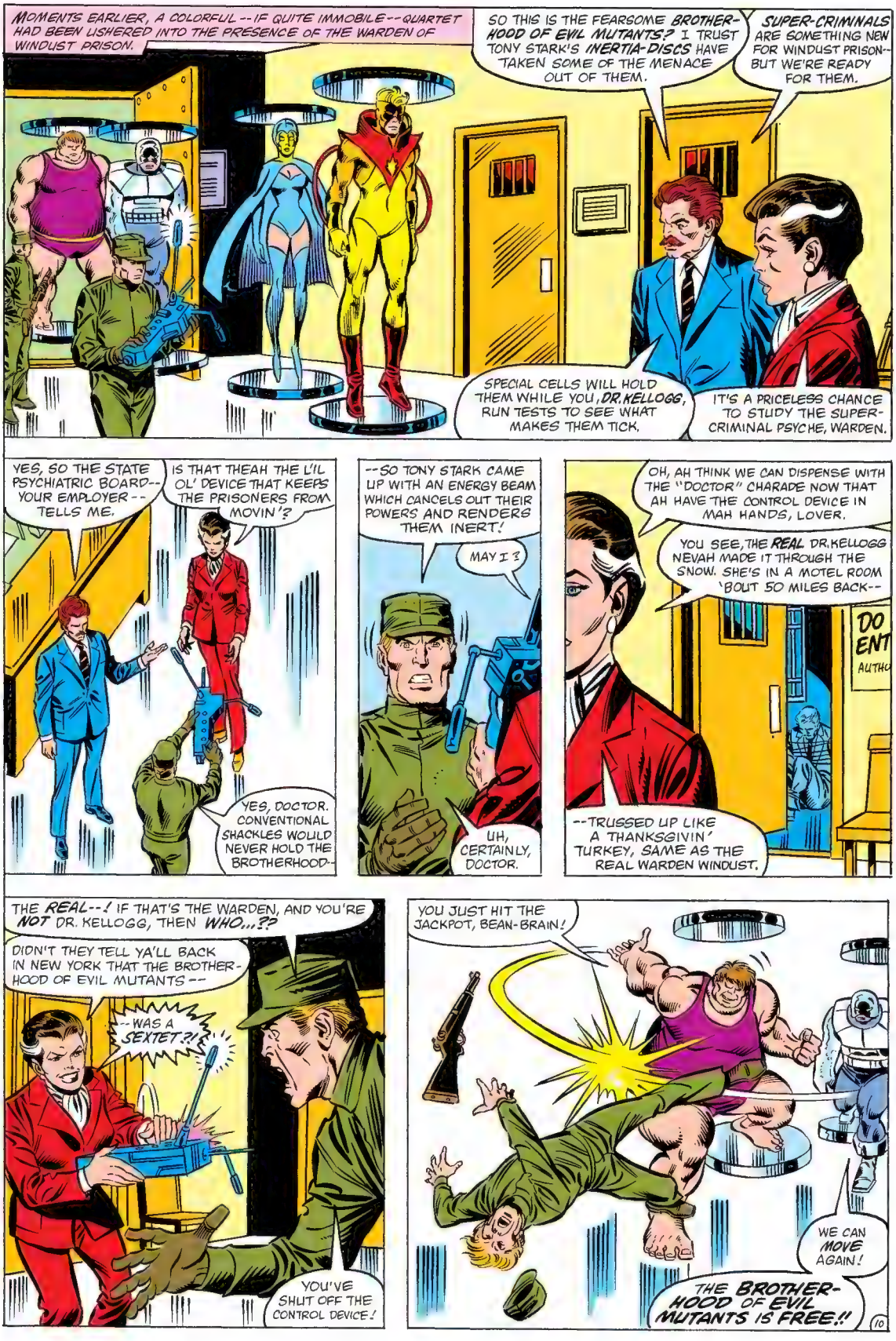
THE BROTHERHOOD'S ESCAPE FROM RYKERS ISLAND AND THEIR NEAR VICTORY OVER THE AVENGERS CONVINCED THE AUTHORITIES THAT THEY WERE TOO DANGEROUS TO HOUSE NEAR A MAJOR POPULATION CENTER.
AVALANCHE'S SUBSEQUENT ESCAPE AND ATTEMPT TO BLACKMAIL LOS ANGELES (A DREAM SHATTERED, ALONG WITH EVERY BONE IN AVALANCHE'S ARMS, BY THE HULK) STRENGTHENED THE RESOLVE TO REMOVE THE MUTANTS-- BLOB, AVALANCHE, DESTINY AND PYRO-- TO A SPECIALLY-PREPARED MAXIMUM SECURITY PRISON IN WEST VIRGINIA.
TONY STARK (a.k.a. THE INVINCIBLE IRON MAN) PROVIDED THE ESCAPE-PROOF TRANSPORTATION. NATURE PROVIDED THE SNOWSTORM.
AND WINDUST PRISON PROVIDED THE ROAD CREW.
HEY!
I'M SLIPPIN'!
SIGNAL THE VAN TO STOP! THOSE JAIL-BIRDS ARE CHAINED TOGETHER!
ONE'S FALLEN UNDER THE WHEELS, AND HE'S TAKING THE OTHERS WITH HIM!
BRAKES ARE APPLIED, BUT THE HUGE TRANSPORT CONTINUES FORWARD.
WE'RE SKIDDING! CAN'T STOP!
MOTHER OF MERCY! WHEELS AS BIG AS VOLKSWAGONS!
THEY'RE GONNA ROLL RIGHT OVER US!
CAN'T ANYBODY DO ANYTHING TO STOP THEM??!
HE STREAKS OUT OF THE SKY LIKE A SLASH OF SILVER.
L-LOOK!
WH-WHAT IS IT?!

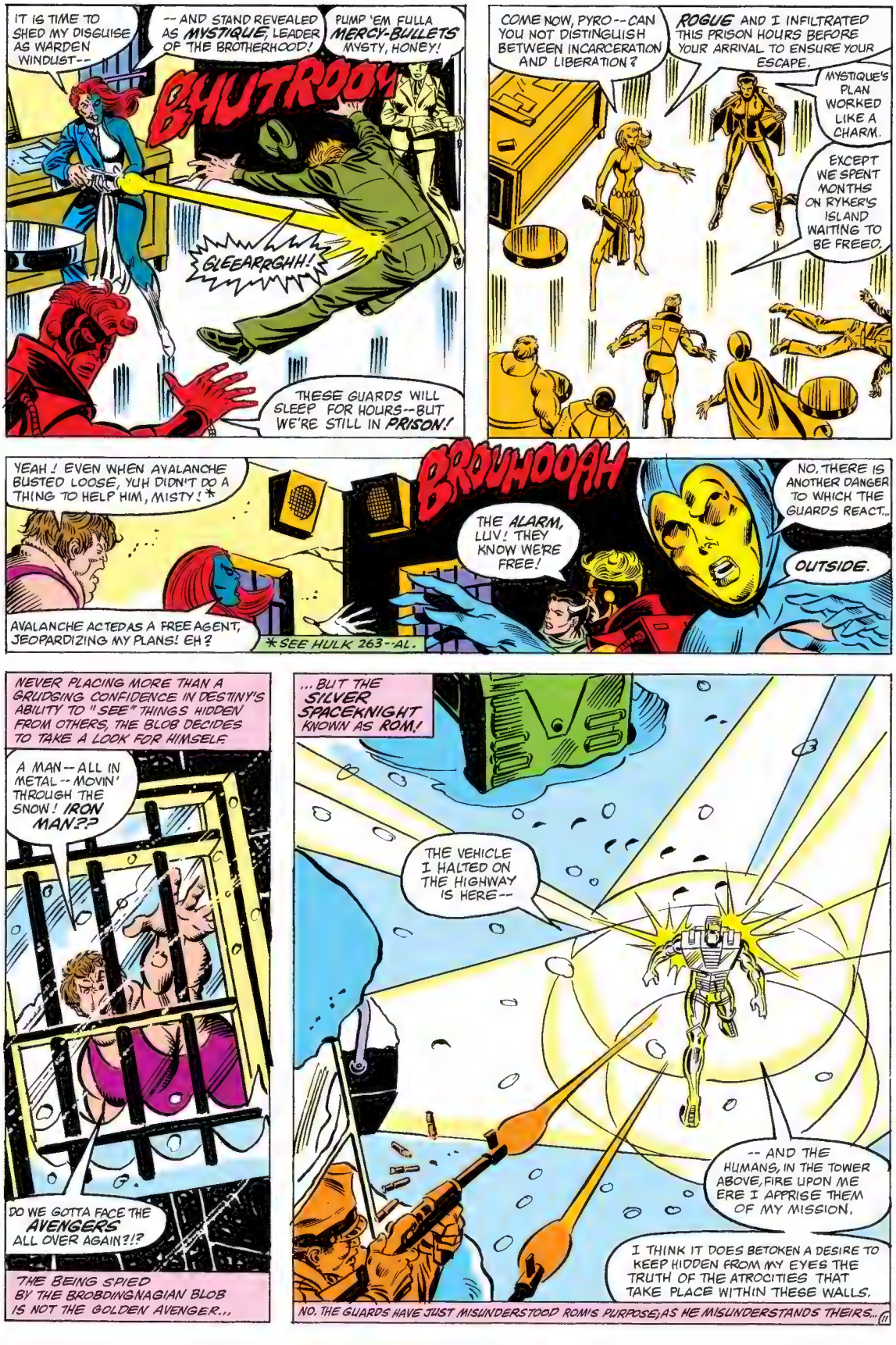
HE IS ROM, SPACEKNIGHT!
THE HUGE TRANSPORT SHUDDERS TO A HALT, ITS FORWARD MOMENTUM CHECKED BY A POWERFUL CYBORG BEING FROM ANOTHER WORLD.
IN THE CAB OF THE TRANSPORT...
GET ON THE HORN, CO-PILOT, AND TELL THE BOYS IN BACK WE'RE PULLING OUT OF HERE... FAST!
BUT VISIBILITY'S STILL RESTRICTED!
HANG VISIBILITY! WE'VE GOT A POSSIBLE ATTEMPT TO FREE OUR PRISONERS HERE!
MAYDAY! MAYDAY! CONDITION RED!
SECURE FOR BLAST OFF!
FROOSHH!
YOU SHOULD HAVE KNOWN WHEN WE TOLD YOU THE TRANSPORT WAS DESIGNED BY TONY STARK TO EXPECT THE UNEXPECTED.
LOFTED SKYWARD WITH HER COMPANIONS, THE BLIND DESTINY EXPERIENCES A MOMENTARY TWINGE OF DISAPPOINTMENT.
I HAD HOPED WE WOULD BE FREED SOONER RATHER THAN LATER.
NOW THE BROTHERHOOD SHALL HAVE TO BIDE ITS TIME... AND WAIT.
THOUGH SIGHTLESS, DESTINY "SEES" THE FUTURE.
...WHILE OTHERS STILL STAND DOUBTING WHAT THEIR EYES HAVE SHOWN THEM IN THE PRESENT.
THE REAR OF THE VAN TOOK OFF LIKE A ROCKET-- LEAVING THE CHASSIS IN THE SNOW!
THEY WERE AFRAID OF THE GUY IN THE SILVER BODYSUIT WHO STOPPED 'EM IN THEIR TRACKS!
WHO IS HE? WHY'D HE SAVE US?
6

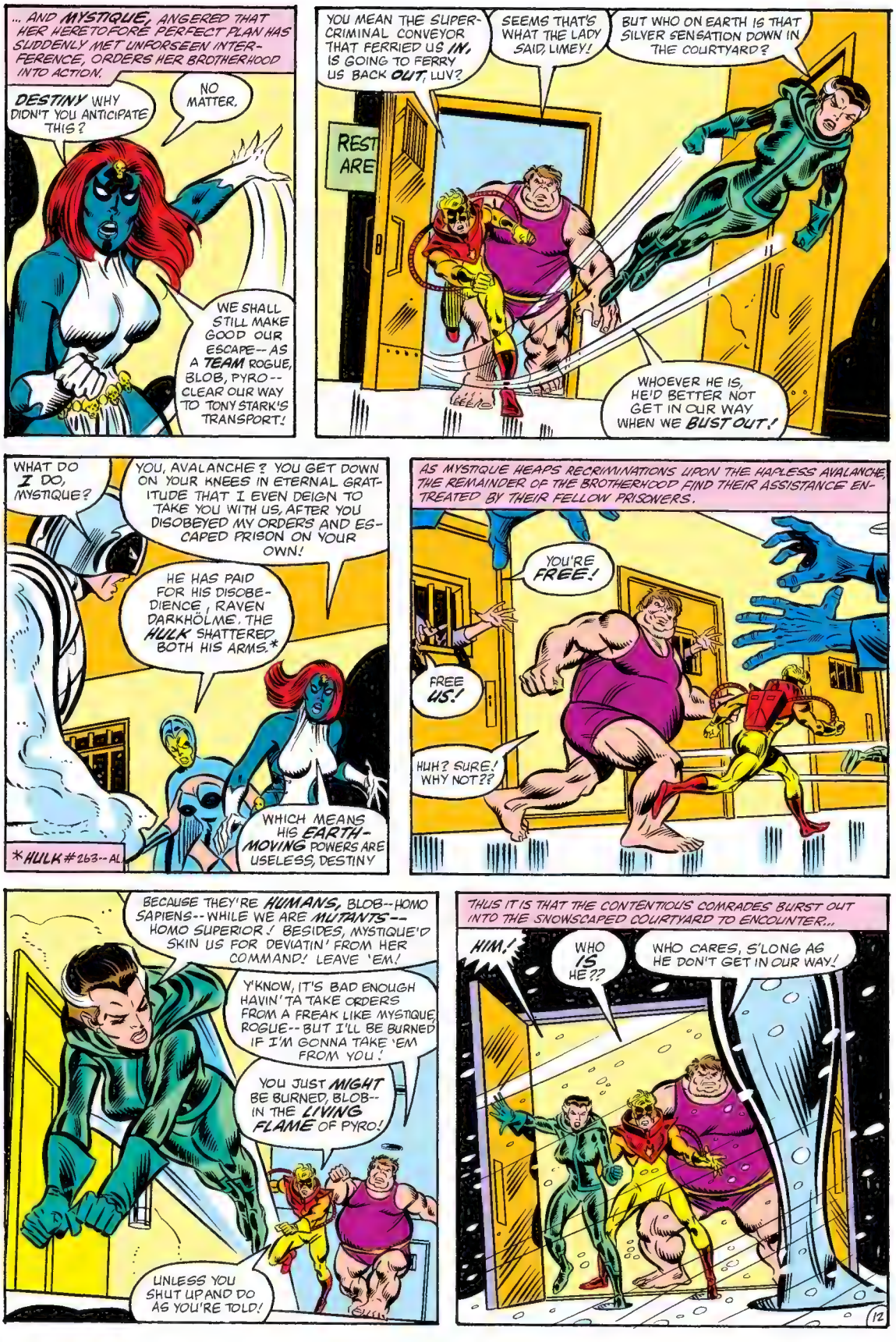

THAT IS A QUESTION THE GUARDS INTEND TO HAVE ANSWERED AS WELL.
STAND WHERE YOU ARE, METAL MAN!
WE WANT TO KNOW WHO YOU ARE--AND WHAT YOU'RE DOING HERE!
AND I WISH TO KNOW WHAT MANNER OF MAN CHAINS HIS FELLOW HUMANS.
IF YOU BE MEN AT ALL.
SOMETHING SHIMMERS IN THE SILVER SPACEKNIGHT'S HAND..
ROM HAS SUMMONED HIS ENERGY ANALYZER FROM SUBSPACE.
A WEAPON! HE'S POINTING A WEAPON AT US!
DROP HIM!
POW POW POW POW POW
SPONG SPONG SPREEOW
PRISON GUARDS ARE A HARDENED LOT, USED TO FACING ANY DANGER THE FELONS IN THEIR CUSTODY HAVE TO OFFER.
BUT CONVICTS ARE HUMAN. YOU SHOOT AT THEM, THEY DROP.
THE GUARDS CAN BE FORGIVEN FOR THEIR FRIGHT WHEN FACED WITH ONE WHO SHRUGS OFF THEIR SHOTS LIKE A DUCK SHEDS RAIN.
WHO ARE YOU AND WHY HAS YOUR FELLOW MAN SEEN FIT TO CHAIN YOU?
HUH?! YOU GOTTA BE KIDDING! WE'RE CON...!
WE'RE SLAVES, THAT'S WHAT WE ARE--FORCED TO DO MANUAL LABOR FOR WARDEN WINDUST!
JAPES, HAVE YOU POPPED YER CORK?
SHADDUP AN' LET ME HANDLE THIS.
7


ROM FURIOUSLY SCANS HIS MEMORY CIRCUITS FOR SOME DEFINITION OF THE WORD THE HUMAN BEFORE HIM HAS UTTERED.
SLAVE: ONE WHO IS THE CHATTEL-- THE PROPERTY-- OF ANOTHER.
WHAT LIMITED RESEARCH I HAVE DONE INTO THE CUSTOMS OF THIS PLANET HAS REVEALED TO ME THAT SUCH A VILE POSSESSION OF MAN, BY MAN, DID INDEED EXIST.
I WAS NOT AWARE THAT IT EXISTED STILL.
YOU'RE NOT FROM EARTH, ARE YOU? YOU'RE FROM OUTER SPACE!
I AM ROM,-- SPACEKNIGHT OF GOLDEN GALADOR-- COME TO SAVE YOUR WORLD FROM DIRE EVIL.
JAPES MUST BE AS SCARED AS THE REST OF US, BUT HE'S THINKING ON HIS FEET-- CONNING THE SPACEMAN!
THERE'S EVIL HERE! WE WERE ENSLAVED AND MADE TO SERVE IT! YOU SAW HOW OUR MASTERS WOULD'VE LET US DIE BENEATH THE TRUCK!
YES. I SAW.
CONVINCED, ROM SHATTERS THE CHAINS THAT BIND CONVICT TO CONVICT.
GO NOW, UNFETTERED.
GUARD WELL THE FREEDOM I HAVE GIVEN YOU, LEST OTHERS SEEK TO ENSLAVE YOU AGAIN.
MISTER, ONCE JACK JAPES IS FREE, THERE AIN'T ANY MAN GONNA PUT HIM BACK IN CHAINS!
THEN I SHALL DEPART IN THE WAKE OF THE VEHICLE FROM WHICH I SAVED YOU--
--TO SEE FIRSTHAND HOW THIS WORLD, WHICH I HAVE SWORN TO FREE FROM DIRE WRAITH VILLAINY, ENSLAVES ITS OWN KIND.
H-HE'S ROCKETING OFF, JAPES!
YEAH-- TOWARDS WINDUST PRISON!
I'D SURE LOVE TO BE THERE TO SEE THE LOOK ON WARDEN WINDUST'S FACE WHEN THE SPACEMAN ARRIVES TO FREE OUR FELLOW "SLAVES" HAH!
NOT ME! I WANT TO PUT AS MUCH DISTANCE BETWEEN ME AND PRISON AS I CAN.'
WHAT'S THE HURRY! THE SNOW'LL COVER OUR TRACKS--
--AND THE WARDEN'S GONNA HAVE HIS HANDS TOO FULL OF TROUBLE TO SEND ANYONE AFTER US!
MURDERERS, THIEVES, PROFESSIONAL FELONS ALL, THE CONVICTS DISAPPEAR INTO THE WILDS OF WEST VIRGINIA. 8

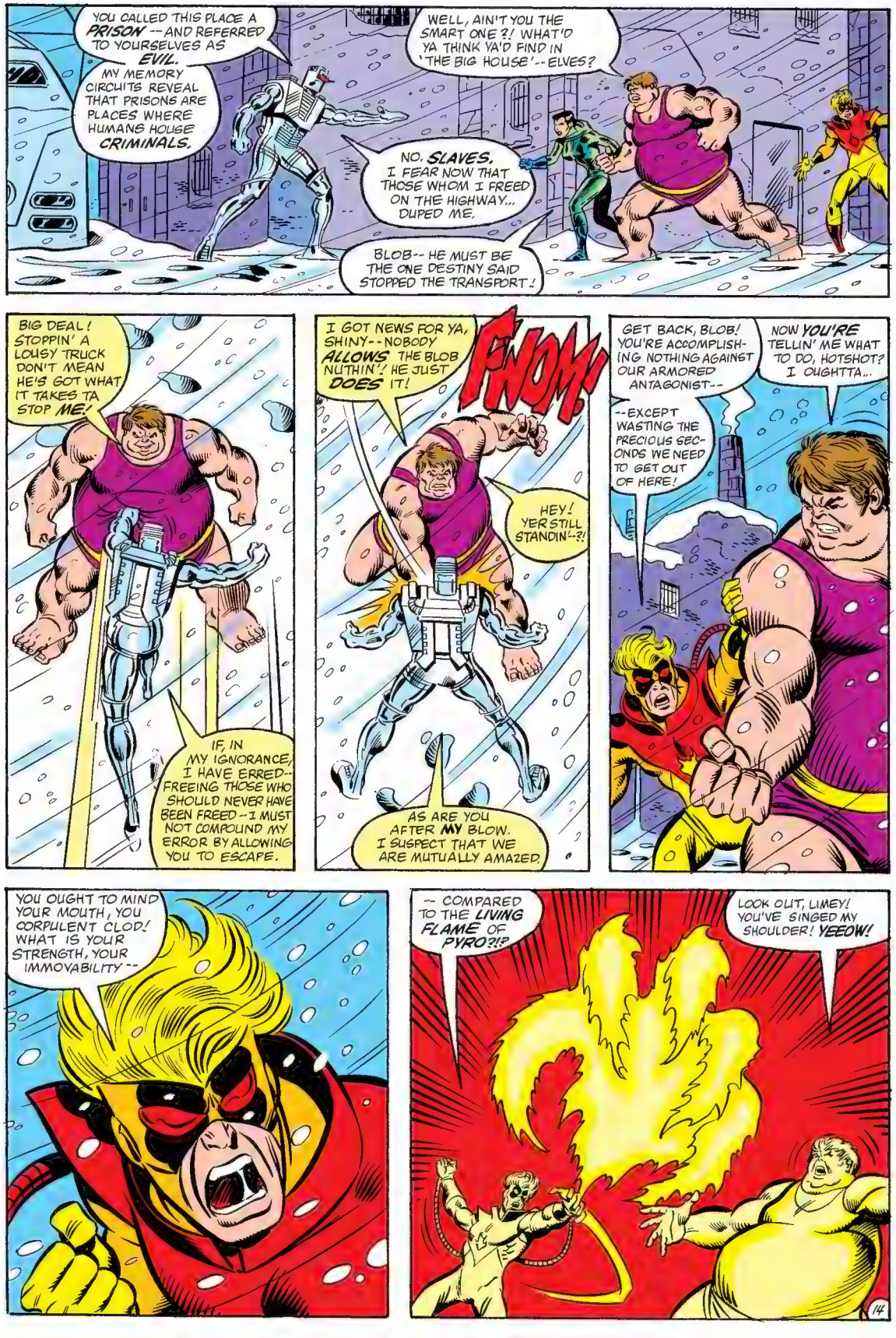
MILES AHEAD, THE STARK INDUSTRIES SUPER-CRIMINAL CONVEYOR LANDS IN THE SNOW-COVERED INNER COURTYARD OF WINDUST MAXIMUM SECURITY PRISON.
SOMETHING MUST'VE HAPPENED BACK ON THE HIGHWAY FOR THEM TO CHANCE A FLY-IN THROUGH THIS BLIZZARD!
ORDER'S COME DOWN FOR US TO KEEP OUR EYES OPEN FOR ANY-THING OUT OF THE ORDINARY!
LIKE THAT BABE FROM THE STATE PSYCHIATRIC BOARD WHO SHOWED UP A LITTLE WHILE AGO?
THAT ONE COULDA MELTED A PATH THROUGH THE ARCTIC WITH THOSE SMOKY EYES OF HERS!
FUNNY HOW SHE MADE IT THROUGH THE SNOW WITH ALL THE ROADS BLOCKED, THOUGH. HEY!
I THOUGHT I SAW SOME-ONE DOWN BY THE MAIN GATE!
SEARCHLIGHTS COME ON, STABBING THROUGH THE SHIFTING WALL OF WHITENESS...
TO ILLUMINATE A SIGHT MOST INCREDIBLE, AT THE PRISON'S PORTAL.
IS THIS WHERE MEN CAGE OTHER MEN?
A-AM I SEEING WHAT I THINK I'M SEEING?
SOME KIND OF ROBOT JUST TORE THE MAIN GATE OFF ITS HINGES!
WHATEVER IT IS, IT DEFINITELY FILLS THE BILL FOR EXTRAORDINARY!
SOUND THE ALARM!

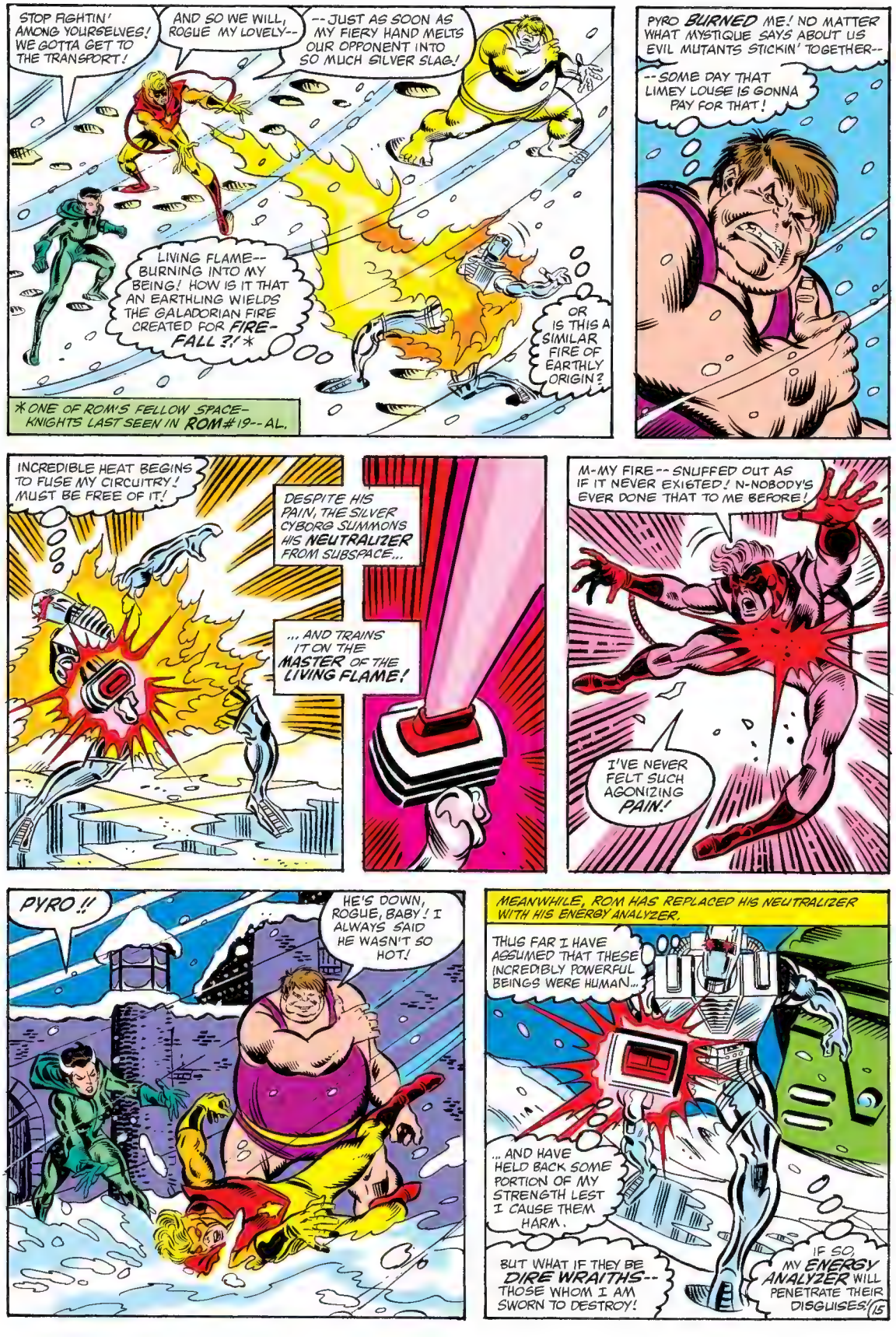

MOMENTS EARLIER, A COLORFUL--IF QUITE IMMOBILE--QUARTET HAD BEEN USHERED INTO THE PRESENCE OF THE WARDEN OF WINDUST PRISON.
SO THIS IS THE FEARSOME BROTHERHOOD OF EVIL MUTANTS? I TRUST TONY STARK'S INERTIA-DISCS HAVE TAKEN SOME OF THE MENACE OUT OF THEM.
SUPER-CRIMINALS ARE SOMETHING NEW FOR WINDUST PRISON--BUT WE'RE READY FOR THEM.
SPECIAL CELLS WILL HOLD THEM WHILE YOU, DR. KELLOGG, RUN TESTS TO SEE WHAT MAKES THEM TICK.
IT'S A PRICELESS CHANCE TO STUDY THE SUPER-CRIMINAL PSYCHE, WARDEN.
YES, SO THE STATE PSYCHIATRIC BOARD--YOUR EMPLOYER--TELLS ME.
IS THAT THEAH THE L'IL OL' DEVICE THAT KEEPS THE PRISONERS FROM MOVIN'?
YES, DOCTOR. CONVENTIONAL SHACKLES WOULD NEVER HOLD THE BROTHERHOOD--
--SO TONY STARK CAME UP WITH AN ENERGY BEAM WHICH CANCELS OUT THEIR POWERS AND RENDERS THEM INERT!
MAY I?
UH, CERTAINLY, DOCTOR.
OH, AH THINK WE CAN DISPENSE WITH THE "DOCTOR" CHARADE NOW THAT AH HAVE THE CONTROL DEVICE IN MAH HANDS, LOVER.
YOU SEE, THE REAL DR. KELLOGG NEVAH MADE IT THROUGH THE SNOW. SHE'S IN A MOTEL ROOM 'BOUT 50 MILES BACK--
--TRUSSED UP LIKE A THANKSGIVIN' TURKEY, SAME AS THE REAL WARDEN WINDUST.
THE REAL--! IF THAT'S THE WARDEN, AND YOU'RE NOT DR. KELLOGG, THEN WHO...??
DIDN'T THEY TELL YA'LL BACK IN NEW YORK THAT THE BROTHERHOOD OF EVIL MUTANTS--
--WAS A SEXTET?!
YOU'VE SHUT OFF THE CONTROL DEVICE!
YOU JUST HIT THE JACKPOT, BEAN-BRAIN!
WE CAN MOVE AGAIN!
THE BROTHERHOOD OF EVIL MUTANTS IS FREE!!
10

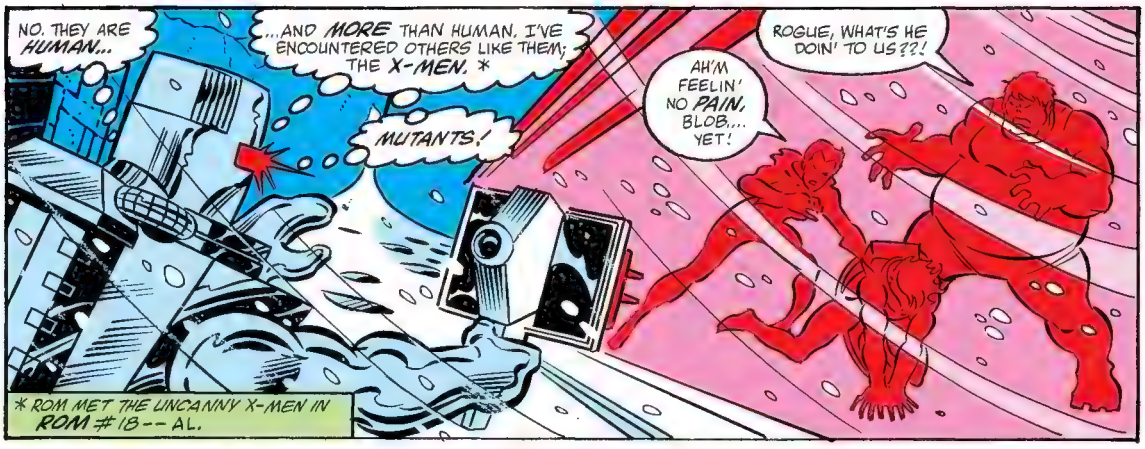

IT IS TIME TO SHED MY DISGUISE AS WARDEN WINDUST--
-- AND STAND REVEALED AS MYSTIQUE, LEADER OF THE BROTHERHOOD!
PUMP 'EM FULLA MERCY-BULLETS MYSTY, HONEY!
BHUTROOM
GLEEARRGHH!
THESE GUARDS WILL SLEEP FOR HOURS--BUT WE'RE STILL IN PRISON!
COME NOW, PYRO--CAN YOU NOT DISTINGUISH BETWEEN INCARCERATION AND LIBERATION?
ROGUE AND I INFILTRATED THIS PRISON HOURS BEFORE YOUR ARRIVAL TO ENSURE YOUR ESCAPE.
MYSTIQUE'S PLAN WORKED LIKE A CHARM.
EXCEPT WE SPENT MONTHS ON RYKER'S ISLAND WAITING TO BE FREED.
YEAH! EVEN WHEN AVALANCHE BUSTED LOOSE, YUH DIDN'T DO A THING TO HELP HIM, MISTY!*
AVALANCHE ACTED AS A FREE AGENT, JEOPARDIZING MY PLANS! EH?
*SEE HULK 263--AL.
BROUHOOAH
THE ALARM, LUV! THEY KNOW WE'RE FREE!
NO. THERE IS ANOTHER DANGER TO WHICH THE GUARDS REACT...
OUTSIDE.
NEVER PLACING MORE THAN A GRUDGING CONFIDENCE IN DESTINY'S ABILITY TO "SEE" THINGS HIDDEN FROM OTHERS, THE BLOB DECIDES TO TAKE A LOOK FOR HIMSELF.
A MAN--ALL IN METAL--MOVIN' THROUGH THE SNOW! IRON MAN?!?
DO WE GOTTA FACE THE AVENGERS ALL OVER AGAIN?!?
THE BEING SPIED BY THE BROBDINGNAGIAN BLOB IS NOT THE GOLDEN AVENGER...
...BUT THE SILVER SPACEKNIGHT KNOWN AS ROM!
THE VEHICLE I HALTED ON THE HIGHWAY IS HERE--
-- AND THE HUMANS, IN THE TOWER ABOVE, FIRE UPON ME ERE I APPRISE THEM OF MY MISSION.
I THINK IT DOES BETOKEN A DESIRE TO KEEP HIDDEN FROM MY EYES THE TRUTH OF THE ATROCITIES THAT TAKE PLACE WITHIN THESE WALLS.
NO. THE GUARDS HAVE JUST MISUNDERSTOOD ROM'S PURPOSE; AS HE MISUNDERSTANDS THEIRS...


... AND MYSTIQUE, ANGERED THAT HER HERETOFORE PERFECT PLAN HAS SUDDENLY MET UNFORSEEN INTERFERENCE, ORDERS HER BROTHERHOOD INTO ACTION.
DESTINY WHY DIDN'T YOU ANTICIPATE THIS?
NO MATTER.
WE SHALL STILL MAKE GOOD OUR ESCAPE-- AS A TEAM ROGUE, BLOB, PYRO-- CLEAR OUR WAY TO TONY STARK'S TRANSPORT!
YOU MEAN THE SUPER-CRIMINAL CONVEYOR THAT FERRIED US IN, IS GOING TO FERRY US BACK OUT, LUV?
SEEMS THAT'S WHAT THE LADY SAID, LIMEY!
BUT WHO ON EARTH IS THAT SILVER SENSATION DOWN IN THE COURTYARD?
REST ARE
WHOEVER HE IS, HE'D BETTER NOT GET IN OUR WAY WHEN WE BUST OUT!
WHAT DO I DO, MYSTIQUE?
YOU, AVALANCHE? YOU GET DOWN ON YOUR KNEES IN ETERNAL GRATITUDE THAT I EVEN DEIGN TO TAKE YOU WITH US, AFTER YOU DISOBEYED MY ORDERS AND ESCAPED PRISON ON YOUR OWN!
HE HAS PAID FOR HIS DISOBEDIENCE, RAVEN DARKHOLME. THE HULK SHATTERED BOTH HIS ARMS.*
WHICH MEANS HIS EARTH-MOVING POWERS ARE USELESS, DESTINY
*HULK #263--AL
AS MYSTIQUE HEAPS RECRIMINATIONS UPON THE HAPLESS AVALANCHE, THE REMAINDER OF THE BROTHERHOOD FIND THEIR ASSISTANCE ENTREATED BY THEIR FELLOW PRISONERS.
YOU'RE FREE!
FREE US!
HUH? SURE! WHY NOT??
BECAUSE THEY'RE HUMANS, BLOB--HOMO SAPIENS--WHILE WE ARE MUTANTS--HOMO SUPERIOR! BESIDES, MYSTIQUE'D SKIN US FOR DEVIATIN' FROM HER COMMAND! LEAVE 'EM!
Y'KNOW, IT'S BAD ENOUGH HAVIN' TA TAKE ORDERS FROM A FREAK LIKE MYSTIQUE, ROGUE--BUT I'LL BE BURNED IF I'M GONNA TAKE 'EM FROM YOU!
YOU JUST MIGHT BE BURNED, BLOB--IN THE LIVING FLAME OF PYRO!
UNLESS YOU SHUT UP AND DO AS YOU'RE TOLD!
THUS IT IS THAT THE CONTENTIOUS COMRADES BURST OUT INTO THE SNOWSCAPED COURTYARD TO ENCOUNTER...
HIM!
WHO IS HE??
WHO CARES, S'LONG AS HE DON'T GET IN OUR WAY!
12

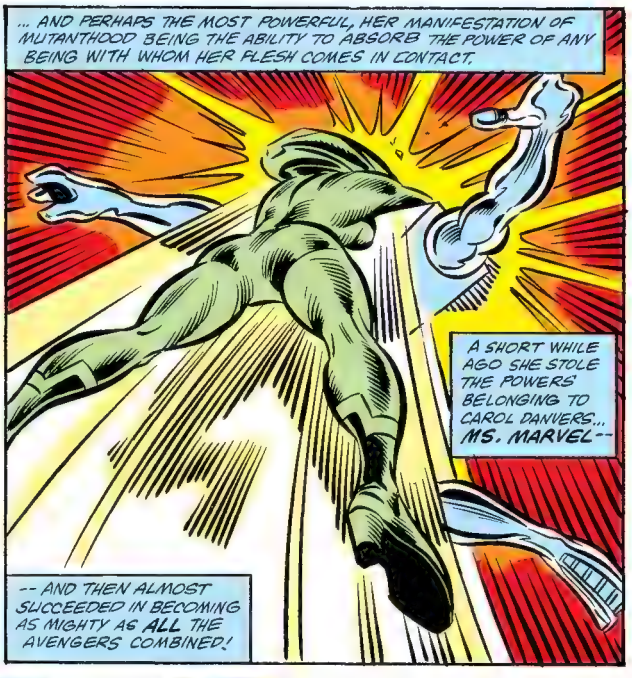
I AM ROM SPACEKNIGHT AND YOU...?
WE, MY SILVER FRIEND, ARE THREE OF THE BROTHERHOOD OF EVIL MUTANTS, AND YOU STAND BETWEEN US AND OUR SOLE MEANS OF ESCAPE FROM WINDUST PRISON!
NOW WILL YOU STEP ASIDE, OR MUST I MELT YOU WHERE YOU STAND?!
IN THE GUARD TOWERS ABOVE...
CAN'T HEAR WHAT THEY'RE SAYING, BUT FIVE'LL GET YOU TEN THE SILVER GUY'S COME TO SPRING THE SUPER-CRIMINALS!
OUR BULLETS HAVE NO AFFECT ON HIM, BUT I BET THEY'LL STOP THOSE MUTANTS!
PYRO! THE GUARDS ARE TRAININ' THEIR RIFLES ON US!
HAVE NO FEAR, ROGUE MY DEAR--THEY'LL SOON FIND THEIR WEAPONRY TOO HOT TO HOLD!
A HAND OF LIVING FLAME SIZZLES THROUGH THE FALLING SNOW...
YAAAGHH!
ARRRGHH!
... AND, FROM TOWER TO TOWER, GUARDS SCREAM, AS MELTING WEAPONS DROP FROM THEIR BLISTERED HANDS.
13

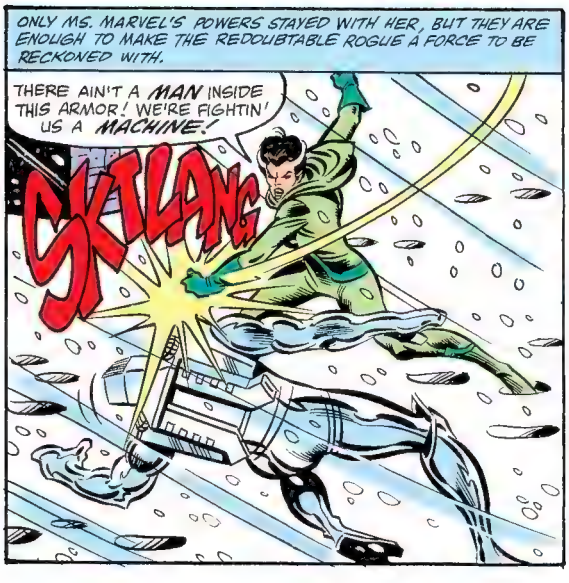

YOU CALLED THIS PLACE A PRISON -- AND REFERRED TO YOURSELVES AS EVIL.
MY MEMORY CIRCUITS REVEAL THAT PRISONS ARE PLACES WHERE HUMANS HOUSE CRIMINALS.
WELL, AIN'T YOU THE SMART ONE?! WHAT'D YA THINK YA'D FIND IN "THE BIG HOUSE"--ELVES?
NO. SLAVES. I FEAR NOW THAT THOSE WHOM I FREED ON THE HIGHWAY... DUPED ME.
BLOB-- HE MUST BE THE ONE DESTINY SAID STOPPED THE TRANSPORT!
BIG DEAL! STOPPIN' A LOUSY TRUCK DON'T MEAN HE'S GOT WHAT IT TAKES TA STOP ME!
IF, IN MY IGNORANCE, I HAVE ERRED-- FREEING THOSE WHO SHOULD NEVER HAVE BEEN FREED--I MUST NOT COMPOUND MY ERROR BY ALLOWING YOU TO ESCAPE.
I GOT NEWS FOR YA, SHINY--NOBODY ALLOWS THE BLOB NUTHIN'! HE JUST DOES IT!
FHOM!
HEY! YER STILL STANDIN'--?!
AS ARE YOU AFTER MY BLOW. I SUSPECT THAT WE ARE MUTUALLY AMAZED.
GET BACK, BLOB! YOU'RE ACCOMPLISHING NOTHING AGAINST OUR ARMORED ANTAGONIST--
--EXCEPT WASTING THE PRECIOUS SECONDS WE NEED TO GET OUT OF HERE!
NOW YOU'RE TELLIN' ME WHAT TO DO, HOTSHOT? I OUGHTTA...
YOU OUGHT TO MIND YOUR MOUTH, YOU CORPULENT CLOD! WHAT IS YOUR STRENGTH, YOUR IMMOVABILITY --
-- COMPARED TO THE LIVING FLAME OF PYRO?!?
LOOK OUT, LIMEY! YOU'VE SINGED MY SHOULDER! YEEOW!
14


STOP FIGHTIN' AMONG YOURSELVES! WE GOTTA GET TO THE TRANSPORT!
AND SO WE WILL, ROGUE MY LOVELY--
--JUST AS SOON AS MY FIERY HAND MELTS OUR OPPONENT INTO SO MUCH SILVER SLAG!
LIVING FLAME-- BURNING INTO MY BEING! HOW IS IT THAT AN EARTHLING WIELDS THE GALADORIAN FIRE CREATED FOR FIRE-FALL?! *
OR IS THIS A SIMILAR FIRE OF EARTHLY ORIGIN?
* ONE OF ROM'S FELLOW SPACE-KNIGHTS LAST SEEN IN ROM #19-- AL.
PYRO BURNED ME! NO MATTER WHAT MYSTIQUE SAYS ABOUT US EVIL MUTANTS STICKIN' TOGETHER--
--SOME DAY THAT LIMEY LOUSE IS GONNA PAY FOR THAT!
INCREDIBLE HEAT BEGINS TO FUSE MY CIRCUITRY! MUST BE FREE OF IT!
DESPITE HIS PAIN, THE SILVER CYBORG SUMMONS HIS NEUTRALIZER FROM SUBSPACE...
... AND TRAINS IT ON THE MASTER OF THE LIVING FLAME!
M-MY FIRE-- SNUFFED OUT AS IF IT NEVER EXISTED! N-NOBODY'S EVER DONE THAT TO ME BEFORE!
I'VE NEVER FELT SUCH AGONIZING PAIN!
PYRO!!
HE'S DOWN, ROGUE, BABY! I ALWAYS SAID HE WASN'T SO HOT!
MEANWHILE, ROM HAS REPLACED HIS NEUTRALIZER WITH HIS ENERGY ANALYZER.
THUS FAR I HAVE ASSUMED THAT THESE INCREDIBLY POWERFUL BEINGS WERE HUMAN...
... AND HAVE HELD BACK SOME PORTION OF MY STRENGTH LEST I CAUSE THEM HARM.
BUT WHAT IF THEY BE DIRE WRAITHS-- THOSE WHOM I AM SWORN TO DESTROY!
IF SO, MY ENERGY ANALYZER WILL PENETRATE THEIR DISGUISES!
15


NO. THEY ARE HUMAN...
...AND MORE THAN HUMAN. I'VE ENCOUNTERED OTHERS LIKE THEM; THE X-MEN. *
MUTANTS!
ROGUE, WHAT'S HE DOIN' TO US??!
AH'M FEELIN' NO PAIN, BLOB,... YET!
* ROM MET THE UNCANNY X-MEN IN ROM #18 -- AL.

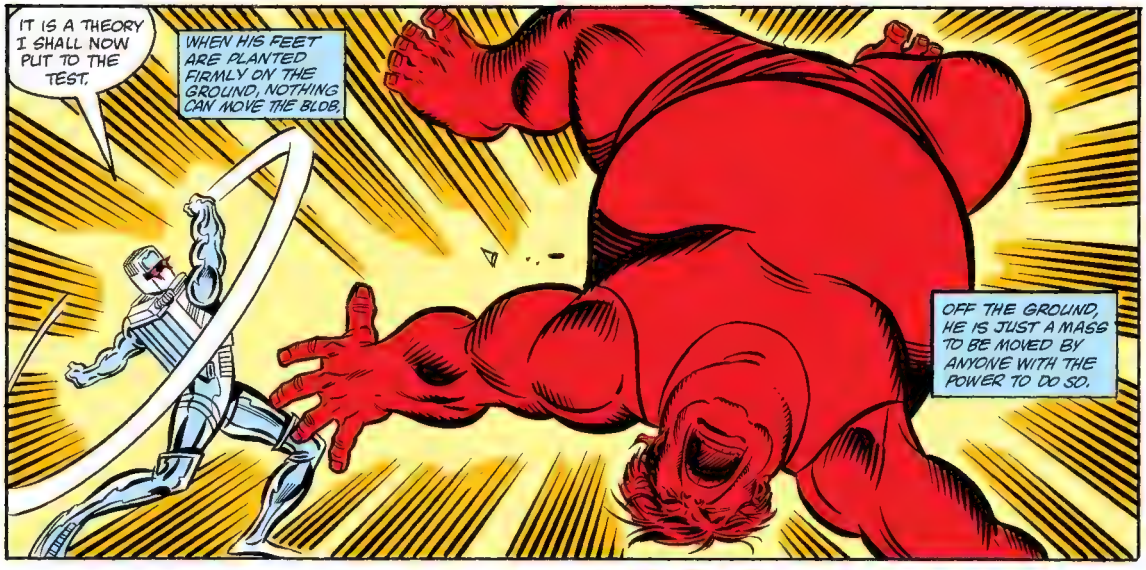
BUT IF THAT THEAH'S A WEAPON IN HIS HAND, AH DON'T INTEND TA GIVE OUR SILVER FRIEND A CHANCE TO INFLICT ANY DAMAGE!
HER NAME IS ROGUE. SHE IS THE YOUNGEST OF THE BROTHERHOOD...


... AND PERHAPS THE MOST POWERFUL, HER MANIFESTATION OF MUTANTHOOD BEING THE ABILITY TO ABSORB THE POWER OF ANY BEING WITH WHOM HER FLESH COMES IN CONTACT.
A SHORT WHILE AGO SHE STOLE THE POWERS BELONGING TO CAROL DANVERS... MS. MARVEL--
-- AND THEN ALMOST SUCCEEDED IN BECOMING AS MIGHTY AS ALL THE AVENGERS COMBINED!

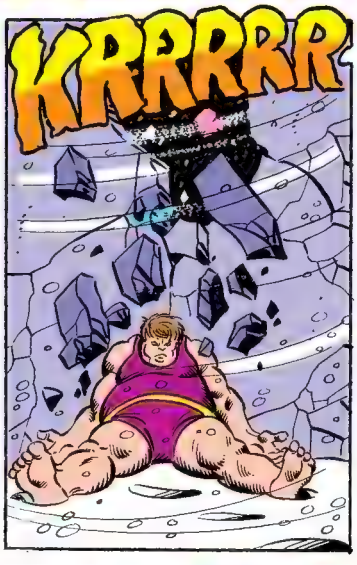

ONLY MS. MARVEL'S POWERS STAYED WITH HER, BUT THEY ARE ENOUGH TO MAKE THE REDOUBTABLE ROGUE A FORCE TO BE RECKONED WITH.
THERE AIN'T A MAN INSIDE THIS ARMOR! WE'RE FIGHTIN' US A MACHINE!
SKTLANG

ROGUE, FINISH THE ROBOT. WE MUST REACH THE AIR VAN.
I OVERHEARD TONY STARK SAYING THAT BUS WAS TOP SECRET, MYSTIQUE -- SO HOW IN BLAZES DO YOU KNOW ALL ABOUT IT?
DELVE NOT TOO DEEPLY INTO THE SECRETS OF MYSTIQUE, AVALANCHE, IF YOU VALUE YOUR OWN PEACE OF MIND.
16

UPON COMING WITHIN EARSHOT OF THE BATTLE IN THE SNOW, DESTINY STIFFENS, HER MIND REACHING OUT, FOWARD IN TIME...
MYSTIQUE, I FEAR OUR PLAN WILL NOT GO AS WE ANTICIPATE.
YOU MEAN WE WON'T GET OUTTA HERE? THERE'S NO WAY I'M GOING TO SPEND ANY MORE TIME IN STIR!
AVA-LANCHE, NO. YOU DO NOT UNDER-STAND...
I UNDER-STAND THAT SHATTERED ARMS OR NO--
--MINE IS STILL THE POWER TO SHATTER THE EARTH!
TARMAC FLOWS LIKE WAVES UPON A SEA...
...CARRY-ING TWO OF AVA-LANCHE'S COMPANIONS WITH IT.
WHAT TH--?!
IT'S AVALANCHE! THE BROKEN-ARMED IDIOT CAN'T CONTROL HIS POWER!
AVALANCHE, CEASE! YOU HAVE MOVED THE EARTH AGAINST OUR OWN PEOPLE!
JUST WANTED TO... HELP.
HE HAS COLLAPSED FROM THE AGONY--
--OF HAVING HIS HAMMERING, EARTH-SHATTERING POWER FLOW THROUGH BROKEN BONES.
THOUGH AVALANCHE GOES DOWN, THE CONTINUING RIPPLES HE HAS CAUSED HURL PYRO AGAINST ROGUE...
LOOK OUT, LUV! I CAN'T STOP MYSELF!
... AND THE BLOB AGAINST ROM.
WHEN LAST I STRUCK YOU, YOU STOOD YOUR GROUND.
I SENSE THAT BEING "GROUNDED" IS THE SECRET OF YOUR IMMOVABILITY.
17


IT IS A THEORY I SHALL NOW PUT TO THE TEST.
WHEN HIS FEET ARE PLANTED FIRMLY ON THE GROUND, NOTHING CAN MOVE THE BLOB.
OFF THE GROUND, HE IS JUST A MASS TO BE MOVED BY ANYONE WITH THE POWER TO DO SO.

ROM POSSESSES SUCH POWER.
UNNGH!
PWOOM!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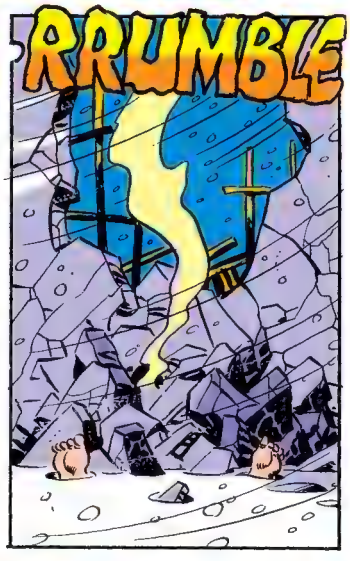
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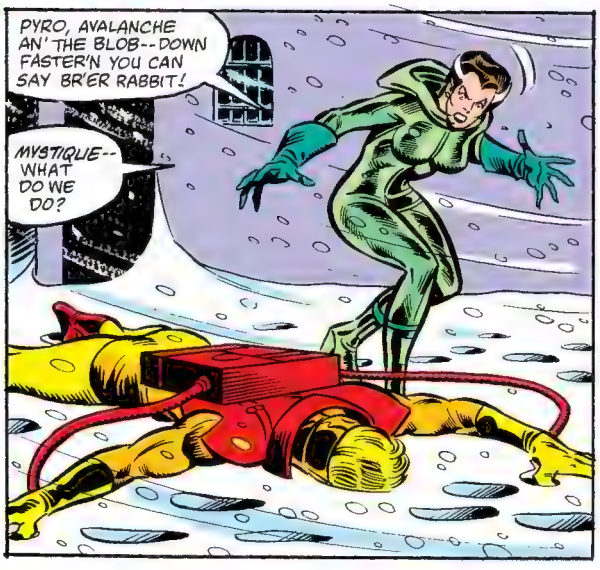
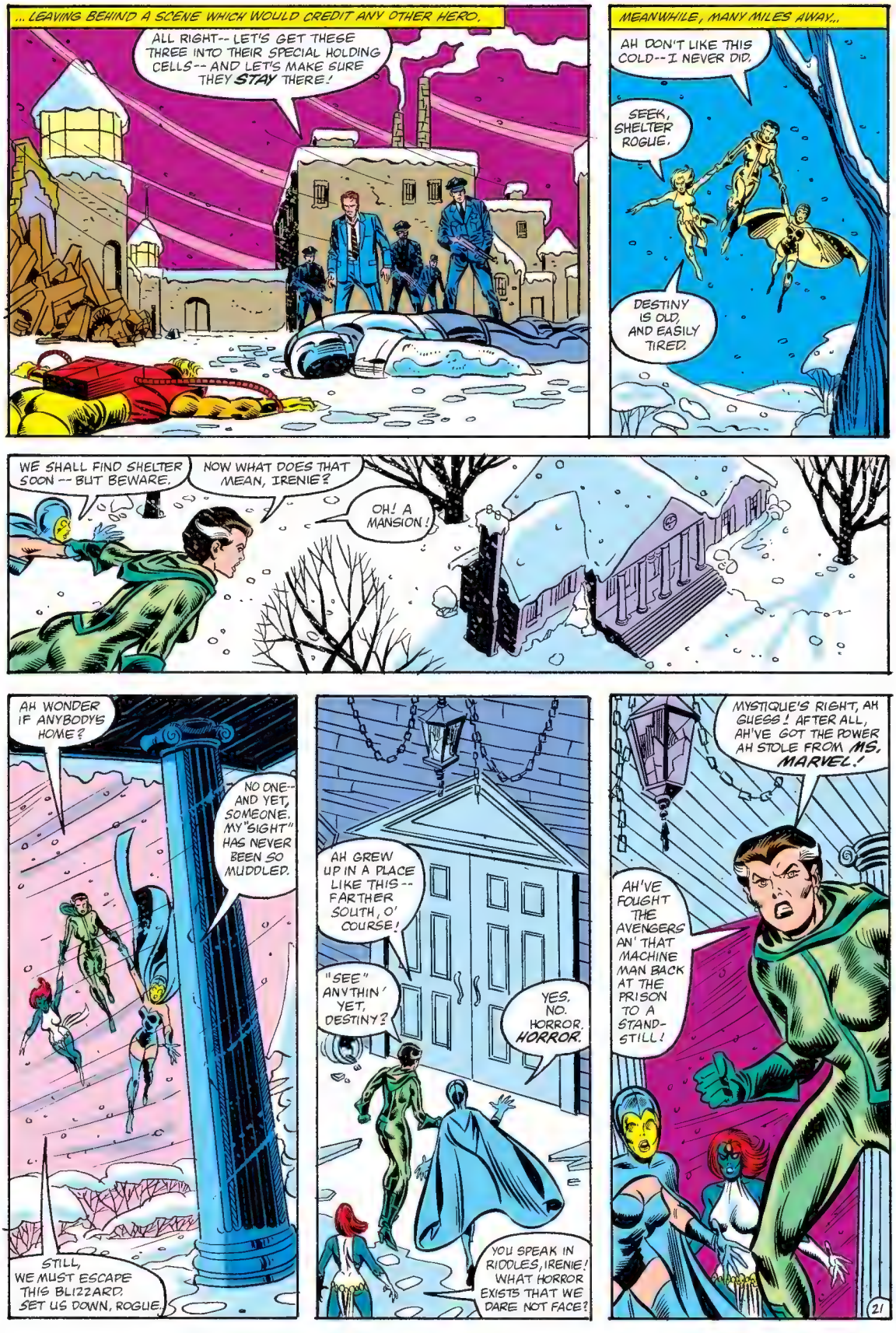
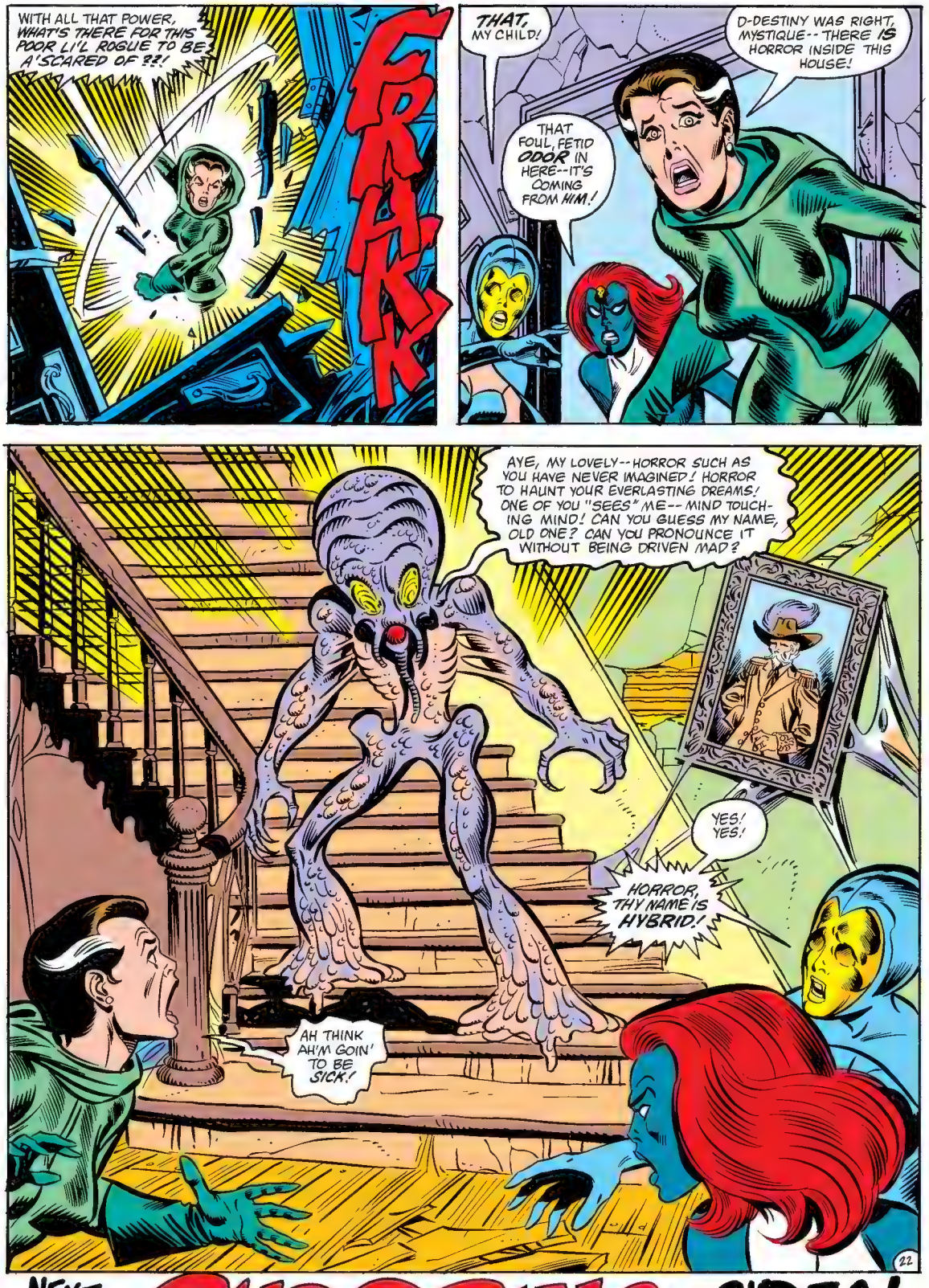

PYRO, AVALANCHE AN' THE BLOB--DOWN FASTER'N YOU CAN SAY BR'ER RABBIT!
MYSTIQUE--WHAT DO WE DO?

RAVEN, THE REAL WARDEN HAS BEEN DISCOVERED AND UNBOUND. THE ENTIRE CORRECTIONS FORCE OF THIS PRISON WILL SOON BE HERE.
CURSE THE LUCK--!
WE CAN'T REVIVE OUR TEAMMATES! WE'LL HAVE TO CUT OUR LOSSES AND RUN!
18

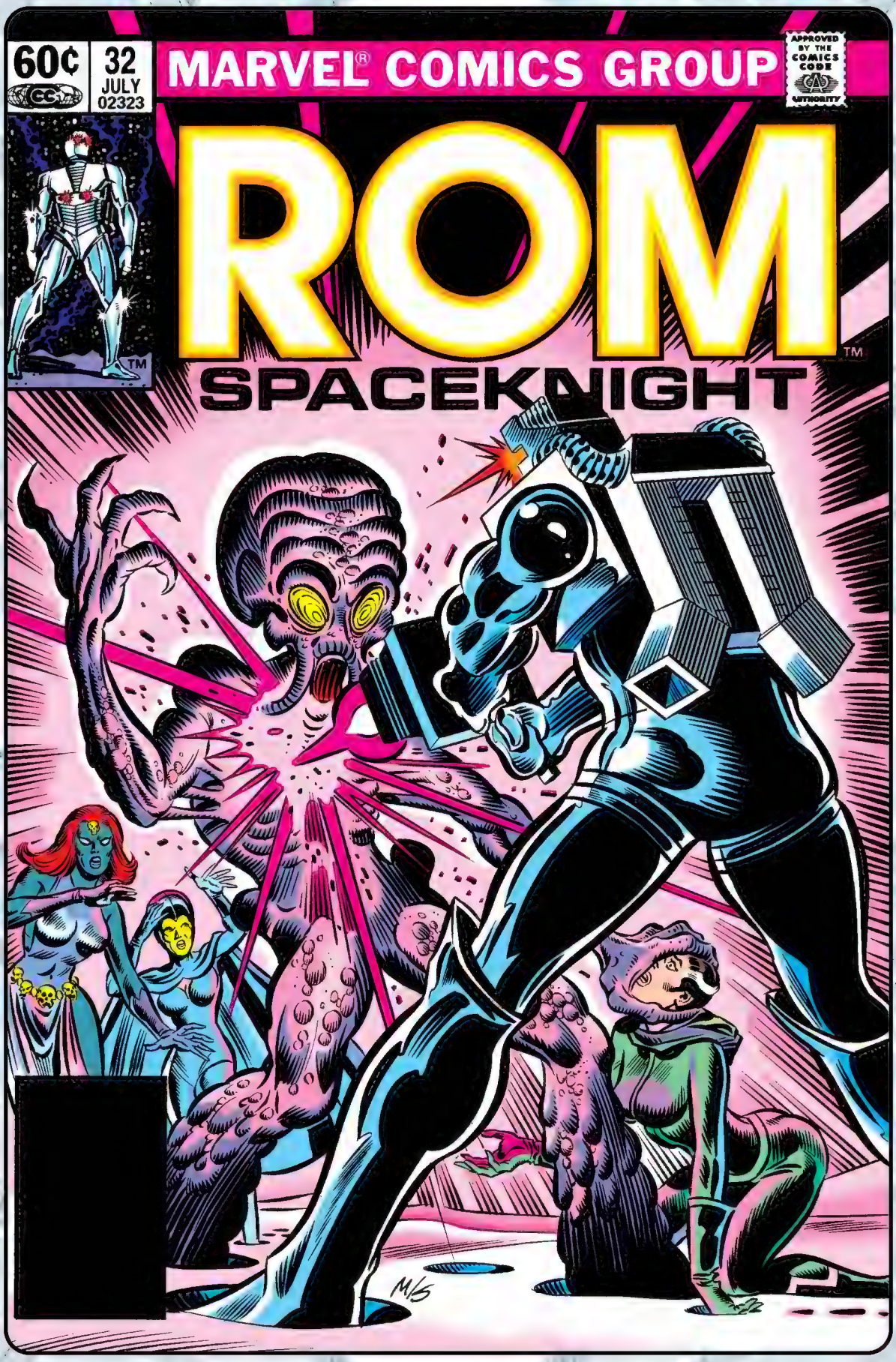
ROGUE, CARRY DESTINY AND ME AWAY FROM HERE!
BUT THE OTHERS--!
THEIR INABILITY TO FIGHT AS A TEAM BROUGHT THEM TO THIS SORRY PASS!
LET THEM BROOD IN PRISON OVER WHAT IT MEANS TO BE A MEMBER OF THE BROTHERHOOD OF EVIL MUTANTS.
AH'M BEGINNIN' TA WONDER IF MAYBE WE SHOULDN'T JUST RENAME OURSELVES THE SISTERHOOD!
IN LESS TIME THAN IT TAKES TO TELL, THE THREE SUPER-POWERED MUTANTS ARE AIRBORNE... AND ONLY THEN DOES ROM RECOVER FROM HIS SURPRISE.
THE ONE CALLED MYSTIQUE--SO LIKE THE X-MAN NIGHT-CRAWLER! CAN IT BE...?
BUT THE SILVER SPACEKNIGHT GETS NO CHANCE TO PURSUE THAT THOUGHT BEFORE A VOICE CRIES OUT...
YOU THERE! STAND WHERE YOU ARE!
IT'S HIM, WARDEN--THE ROBOT WHO ATTACKED THE TRANSPORT OUT ON THE HIGHWAY...
...AND FREED THE CONVICTS ON THE ROAD GANG!
LET ME DEAL WITH THIS.
I'VE SEEN SOME STRANGE THINGS TODAY, METAL MAN--
19

--A WOMAN WHO MADE HERSELF LOOK LIKE ME. ANOTHER WHO FLEW IN TO JOIN HER. A MAN WHO HURLED FIRE. ANOTHER AS BIG AS A MOUNTAIN AND ONE WHO CAN MOVE MOUNTAINS. AND AN OLD BLIND LADY WHO, I'M TOLD, CAN SEE THE FUTURE.
BUT NONE OF THAT'S SO STRANGE AS YOU! FIRST YOU FREE MY PRISONERS, THEN YOU BREAK IN TO MY PRISON--
--AND LASTLY, YOU PREVENT A BREAKOUT BY HALF THE BROTHERHOOD OF EVIL MUTANTS!
JUST WHO IN BLAZES ARE YOU?!?
I AM ROM... SPACE-KNIGHT!
EARLIER, I ENCOUNTERED HUMANS CHAINED. WHEN I ASKED THEM WHY, THEY TOLD ME THEY WERE SLAVES.
SLAVES? THEY WERE SOME OF THE MOST DANGEROUS CRIMINALS IN THE STATE!
SO HAVE I COME TO UNDERSTAND DURING MY BATTLE WITH THE EVIL MUTANTS.
WHAT DO WE DO WITH HIM, WARDEN? HOW DO WE HOLD A GUY WHO ROUTED THE BROTHERHOOD?
THANKS TO HIM, WE'VE STILL GOT THREE OF THEM!
ROM, I DOUBT THERE'S ANY WAY I COULD HOLD YOU AGAINST YOUR WILL, AND I SENSE THAT YOU MEANT NO HARM--
--SO I SUPPOSE I'LL BALANCE THE BOOKS BY GIVING YOU LEAVE TO GO.
I WILL ATTEMPT TO UNDO THE WRONG MY ACTIONS HAVE CAUSED, EARTHLING.
DO ME A FAVOR, SPACEKNIGHT... DO THAT!
IGNITING HIS ROCKET PODS, A SORELY CHASTENED SPACEKNIGHT SOARS FORTH INTO THE STILL-FALLING SNOW...
20


... LEAVING BEHIND A SCENE WHICH WOULD CREDIT ANY OTHER HERO.
ALL RIGHT-- LET'S GET THESE THREE INTO THEIR SPECIAL HOLDING CELLS-- AND LET'S MAKE SURE THEY STAY THERE!
MEANWHILE, MANY MILES AWAY...
AH DON'T LIKE THIS COLD-- I NEVER DID.
SEEK, SHELTER ROGUE.
DESTINY IS OLD, AND EASILY TIRED.
WE SHALL FIND SHELTER SOON -- BUT BEWARE.
NOW WHAT DOES THAT MEAN, IRENIE?
OH! A MANSION!
AH WONDER IF ANYBODY'S HOME?
NO ONE-- AND YET, SOMEONE. MY "SIGHT" HAS NEVER BEEN SO MUDDLED.
STILL, WE MUST ESCAPE THIS BLIZZARD. SET US DOWN, ROGUE.
AH GREW UP IN A PLACE LIKE THIS-- FARTHER SOUTH, O' COURSE!
"SEE" ANYTHIN' YET, DESTINY?
YES, NO. HORROR. HORROR.
YOU SPEAK IN RIDDLES, IRENIE! WHAT HORROR EXISTS THAT WE DARE NOT FACE?
MYSTIQUE'S RIGHT, AH GUESS! AFTER ALL, AH'VE GOT THE POWER AH STOLE FROM MS. MARVEL!
AH'VE FOUGHT THE AVENGERS AN' THAT MACHINE MAN BACK AT THE PRISON TO A STAND-STILL!
21


WITH ALL THAT POWER, WHAT'S THERE FOR THIS POOR LI'L ROGUE TO BE A'SCARED OF ?!
FRAK
THAT, MY CHILD!
D-DESTINY WAS RIGHT, MYSTIQUE--THERE IS HORROR INSIDE THIS HOUSE!
THAT FOUL, FETID ODOR IN HERE--IT'S COMING FROM HIM!
AYE, MY LOVELY--HORROR SUCH AS YOU HAVE NEVER IMAGINED! HORROR TO HAUNT YOUR EVERLASTING DREAMS! ONE OF YOU "SEES" ME--MIND TOUCHING MIND! CAN YOU GUESS MY NAME, OLD ONE? CAN YOU PRONOUNCE IT WITHOUT BEING DRIVEN MAD?
YES! YES!
HORROR, THY NAME IS HYBRID!
AH THINK AH'M GOIN' TO BE SICK!
22

NEXT MONTH: CHOOSING SIDES!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ROM
SPACEKNIGHT
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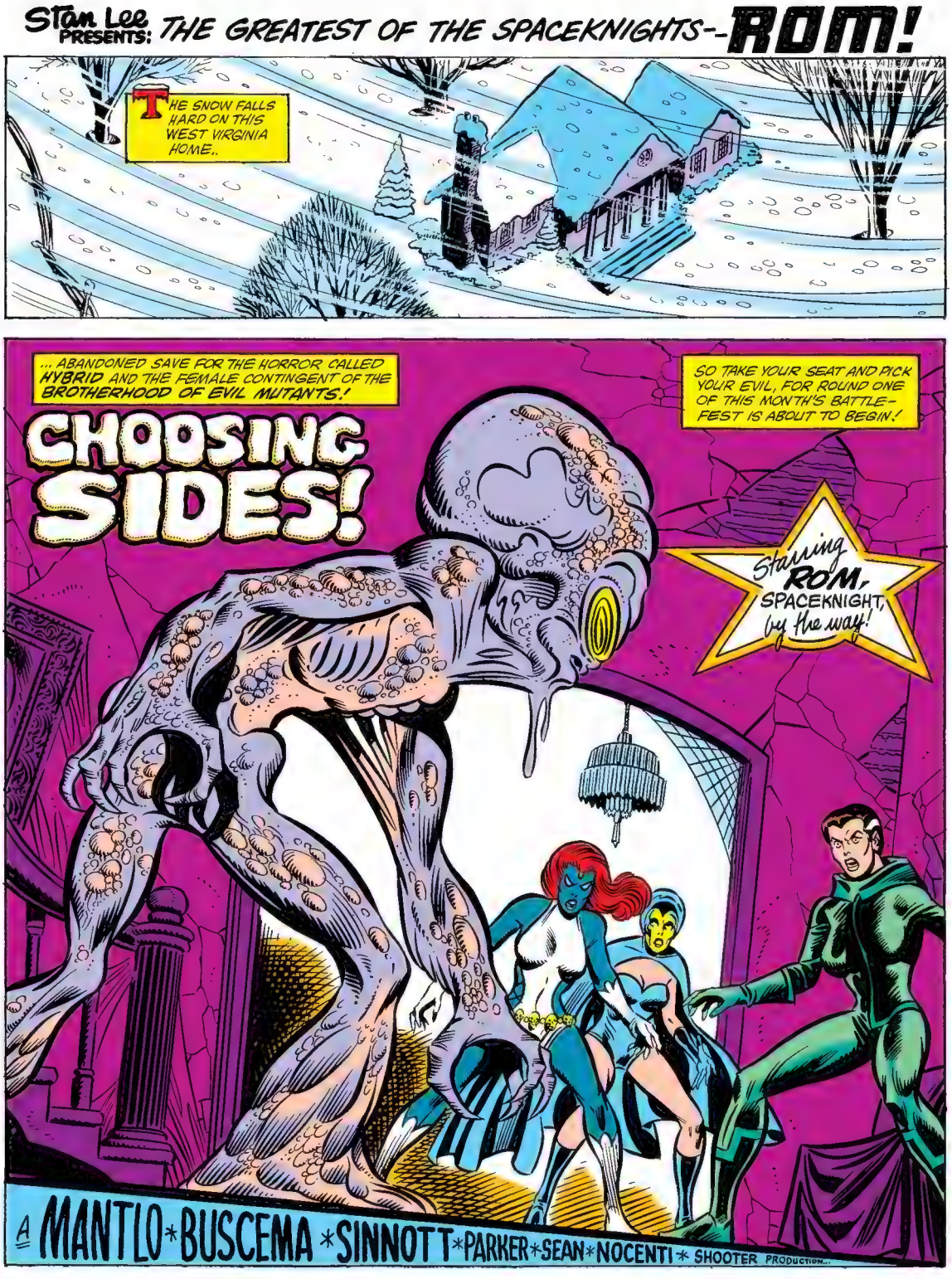
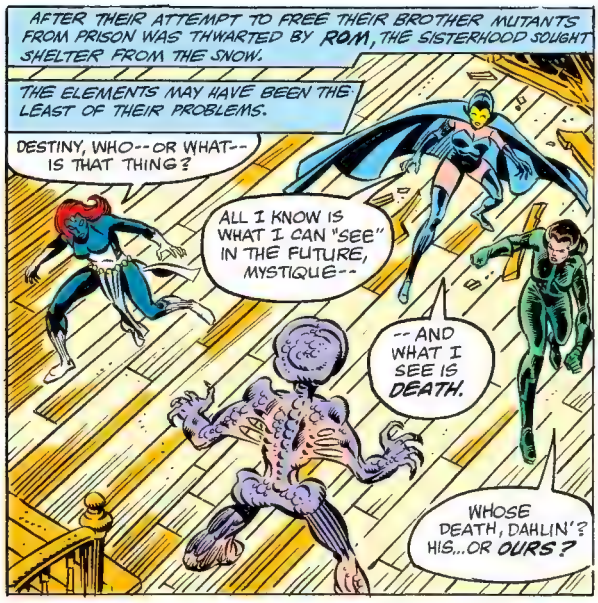
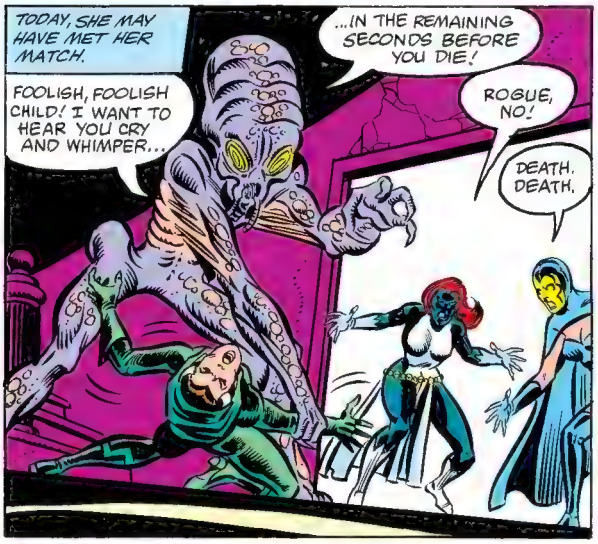
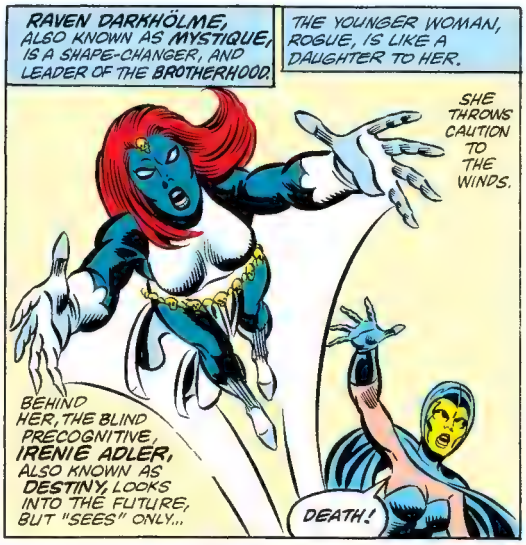
M/S


Stan Lee PRESENTS: THE GREATEST OF THE SPACEKNIGHTS--ROM!
THE SNOW FALLS HARD ON THIS WEST VIRGINIA HOME..
... ABANDONED SAVE FOR THE HORROR CALLED HYBRID AND THE FEMALE CONTINGENT OF THE BROTHERHOOD OF EVIL MUTANTS!
CHOOSING SIDES!
SO TAKE YOUR SEAT AND PICK YOUR EVIL, FOR ROUND ONE OF THIS MONTH'S BATTLE-FEST IS ABOUT TO BEGIN!
Starring ROM, SPACEKNIGHT, by the way!
A MANTLO * BUSCEMA * SINNOTT * PARKER * SEAN * NOCENTI * SHOOTER PRODUCTION...


AFTER THEIR ATTEMPT TO FREE THEIR BROTHER MUTANTS FROM PRISON WAS THWARTED BY ROM, THE SISTERHOOD SOUGHT SHELTER FROM THE SNOW.
THE ELEMENTS MAY HAVE BEEN THE LEAST OF THEIR PROBLEMS.
DESTINY, WHO--OR WHAT--IS THAT THING?
ALL I KNOW IS WHAT I CAN "SEE" IN THE FUTURE, MYSTIQUE--
--AND WHAT I SEE IS DEATH.
WHOSE DEATH, DAHLIN'? HIS...OR OURS?

YOURS, MOST ASSUREDLY, HUMAN!
ROGUE IS A POWER-VAMPIRESS; A SHORT WHILE BACK SHE STOLE AWAY THE POWERS BELONGING TO MS. MARVEL.
SINGLE-HANDEDLY, SHE NEARLY DEFEATED THE MIGHTY AVENGERS.*
*AVENGERS ANNUAL #10--ANN.

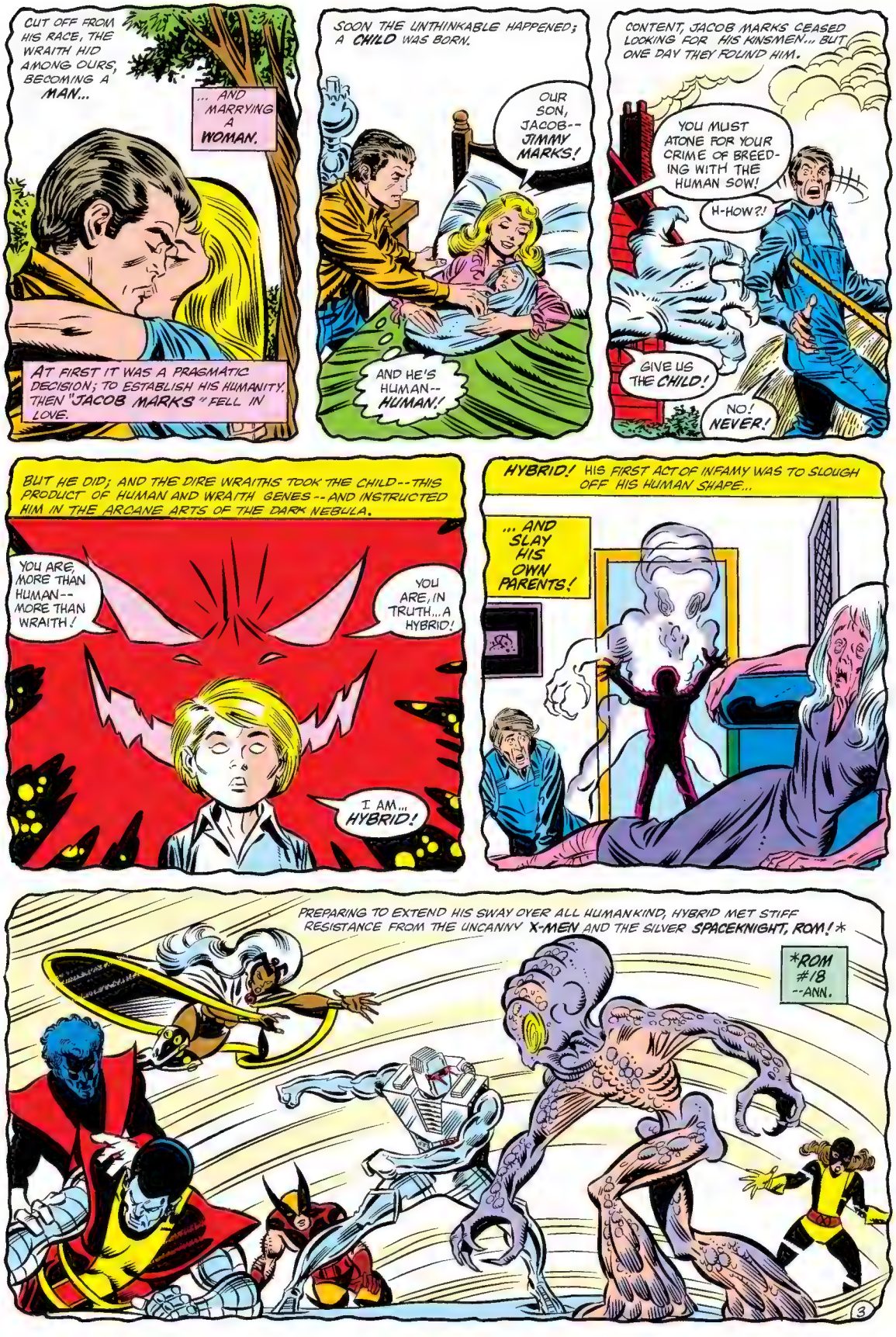

TODAY, SHE MAY HAVE MET HER MATCH.
FOOLISH, FOOLISH CHILD! I WANT TO HEAR YOU CRY AND WHIMPER...
...IN THE REMAINING SECONDS BEFORE YOU DIE!
ROGUE, NO!
DEATH. DEATH.

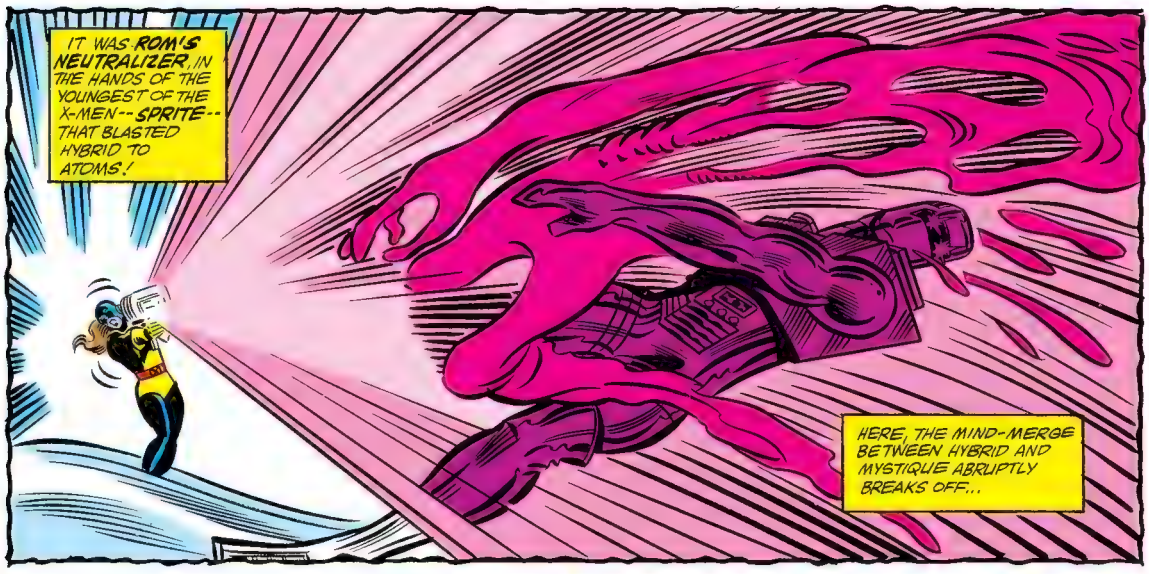

RAVEN DARKHÖLME, ALSO KNOWN AS MYSTIQUE, IS A SHAPE-CHANGER, AND LEADER OF THE BROTHERHOOD.
THE YOUNGER WOMAN, ROGUE, IS LIKE A DAUGHTER TO HER.
SHE THROWS CAUTION TO THE WINDS.
BEHIND HER, THE BLIND PRECOGNITIVE, IRENIE ADLER, ALSO KNOWN AS DESTINY, LOOKS INTO THE FUTURE, BUT "SEES" ONLY...
DEATH!

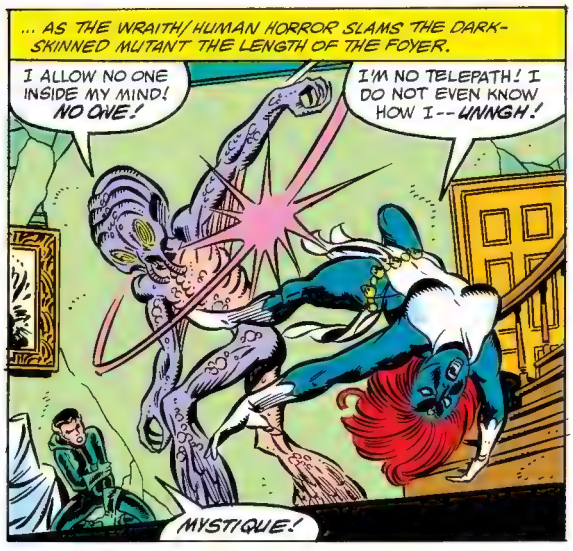
MYSTIQUE KNOWS NOT WHAT SHE HOPES TO DO WHERE ROGUE'S POWERS HAVE ALREADY FAILED. SHE ONLY KNOWS SHE MUST DO SOMETHING.
UPON TOUCHING HYBRID'S GHASTLY, GELATINOUS FLESH...

...MYSTIQUE ALSO TOUCHES HIS MALEVOLENT, INHUMAN MIND!
WHO ARE YOU, WOMAN, THAT YOU CAN DO THIS THING?
WHO ARE YOU, MONSTER, THAT MAKES ME DO IT?

BUT MYSTIQUE FINDS SHE ALREADY "KNOWS" THE ANSWER TO THAT ONE...
SPACESHIP CRASHING ON EARTH... HIDEOUS CREATURE SHAMBLING FORTH--!
DIRE WRAITHS! (2)


CUT OFF FROM HIS RACE, THE WRAITH HID AMONG OURS, BECOMING A MAN...
... AND MARRYING A WOMAN.
AT FIRST IT WAS A PRAGMATIC DECISION; TO ESTABLISH HIS HUMANITY. THEN "JACOB MARKS" FELL IN LOVE.
SOON THE UNTHINKABLE HAPPENED; A CHILD WAS BORN.
OUR SON, JACOB-- JIMMY MARKS!
AND HE'S HUMAN-- HUMAN!
CONTENT, JACOB MARKS CEASED LOOKING FOR HIS KINSMEN... BUT ONE DAY THEY FOUND HIM.
YOU MUST ATONE FOR YOUR CRIME OF BREEDING WITH THE HUMAN SOW!
H-HOW?!
GIVE US THE CHILD!
NO! NEVER!
BUT HE DID; AND THE DIRE WRAITHS TOOK THE CHILD--THIS PRODUCT OF HUMAN AND WRAITH GENES--AND INSTRUCTED HIM IN THE ARCANE ARTS OF THE DARK NEBULA.
YOU ARE, MORE THAN HUMAN-- MORE THAN WRAITH!
YOU ARE, IN TRUTH... A HYBRID!
I AM... HYBRID!
HYBRID! HIS FIRST ACT OF INFAMY WAS TO SLOUGH OFF HIS HUMAN SHAPE...
... AND SLAY HIS OWN PARENTS!
PREPARING TO EXTEND HIS SWAY OVER ALL HUMANKIND, HYBRID MET STIFF RESISTANCE FROM THE UNCANNY X-MEN AND THE SILVER SPACEKNIGHT, ROM!*
*ROM #18 --ANN.
3

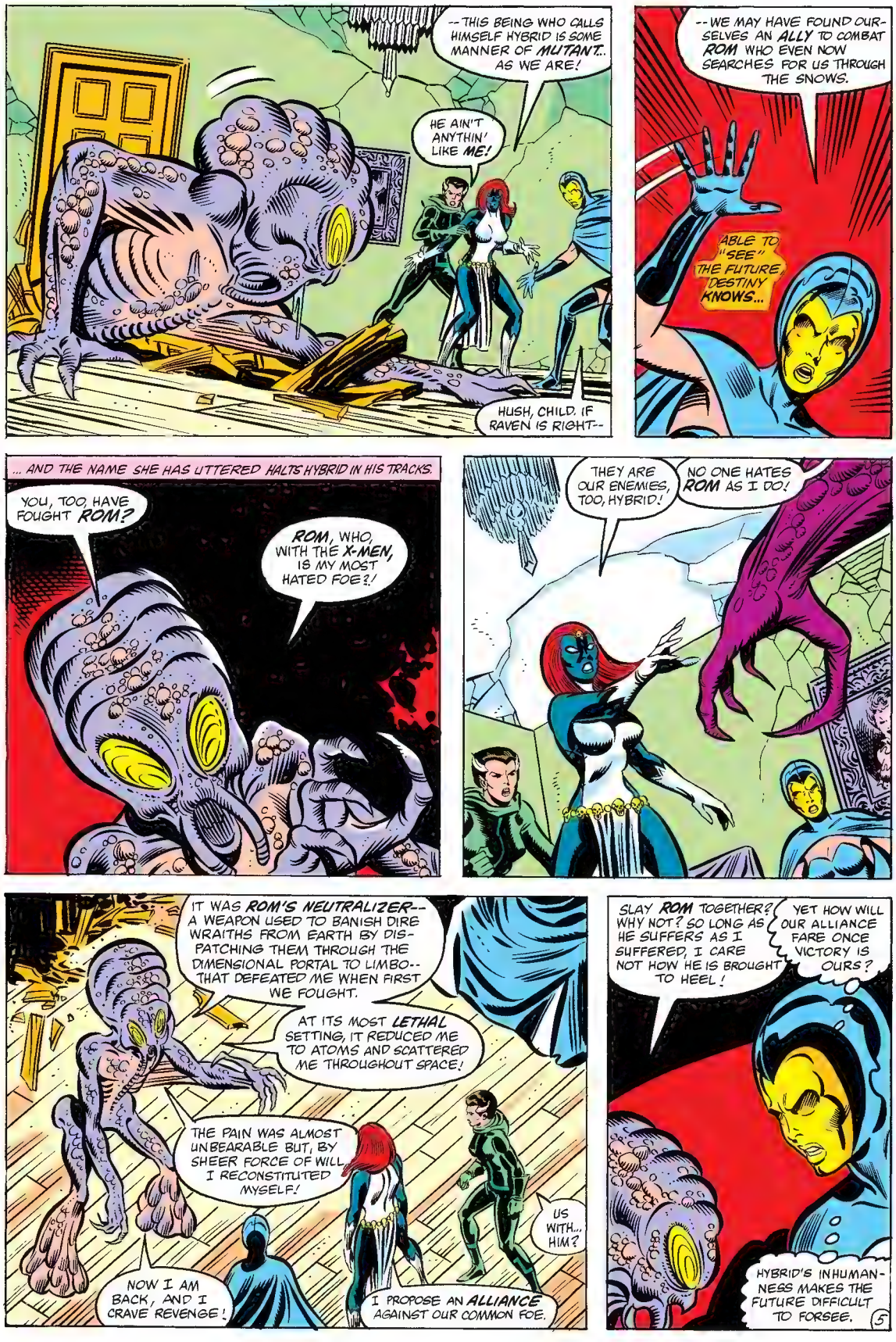

IT WAS ROM'S NEUTRALIZER, IN THE HANDS OF THE YOUNGEST OF THE X-MEN--SPRITE--THAT BLASTED HYBRID TO ATOMS!
HERE, THE MIND-MERGE BETWEEN HYBRID AND MYSTIQUE ABRUPTLY BREAKS OFF...

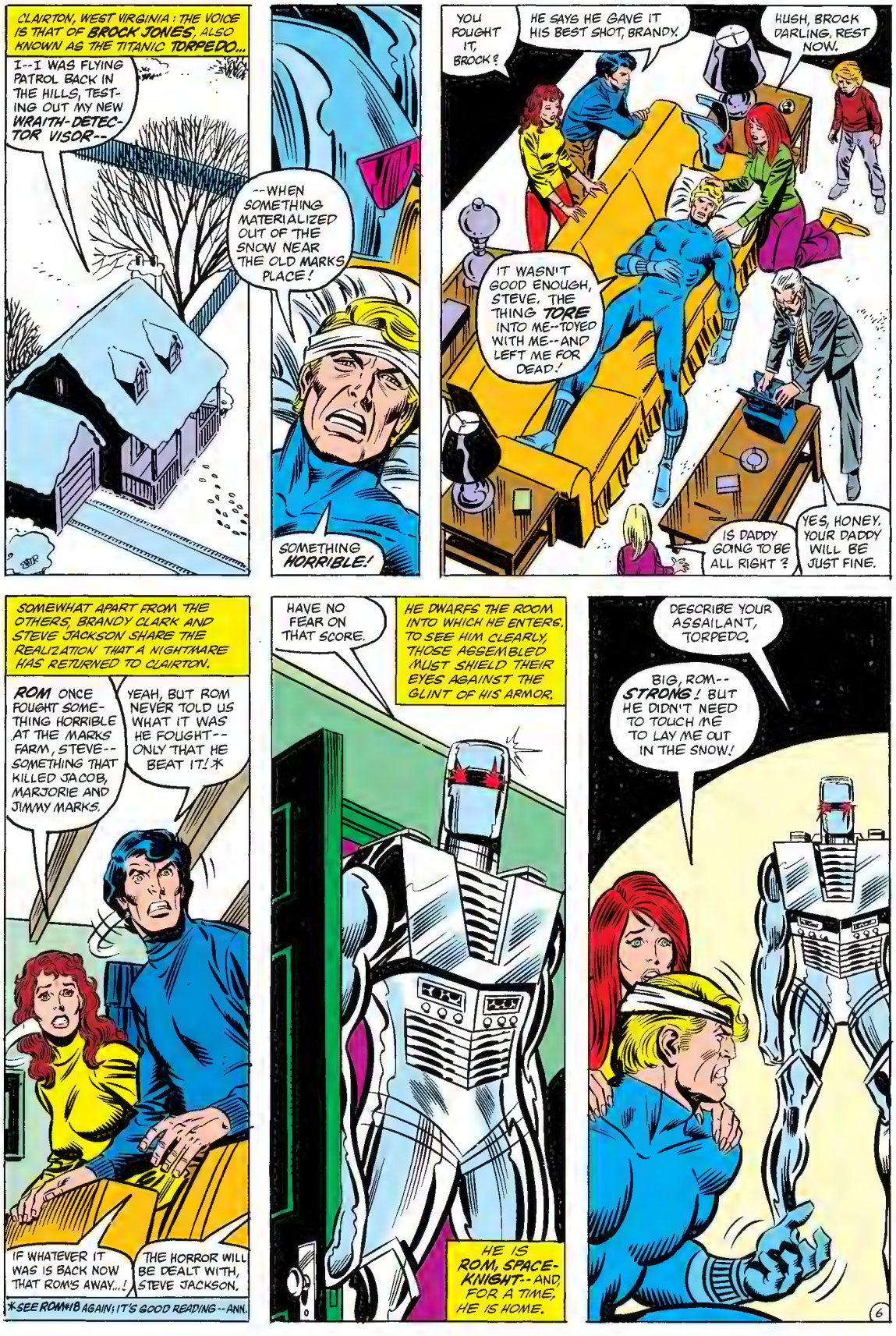

... AS THE WRAITH/HUMAN HORROR SLAMS THE DARK-SKINNED MUTANT THE LENGTH OF THE FOYER.
I ALLOW NO ONE INSIDE MY MIND! NO ONE!
I'M NO TELEPATH! I DO NOT EVEN KNOW HOW I--UNNGH!
MYSTIQUE!

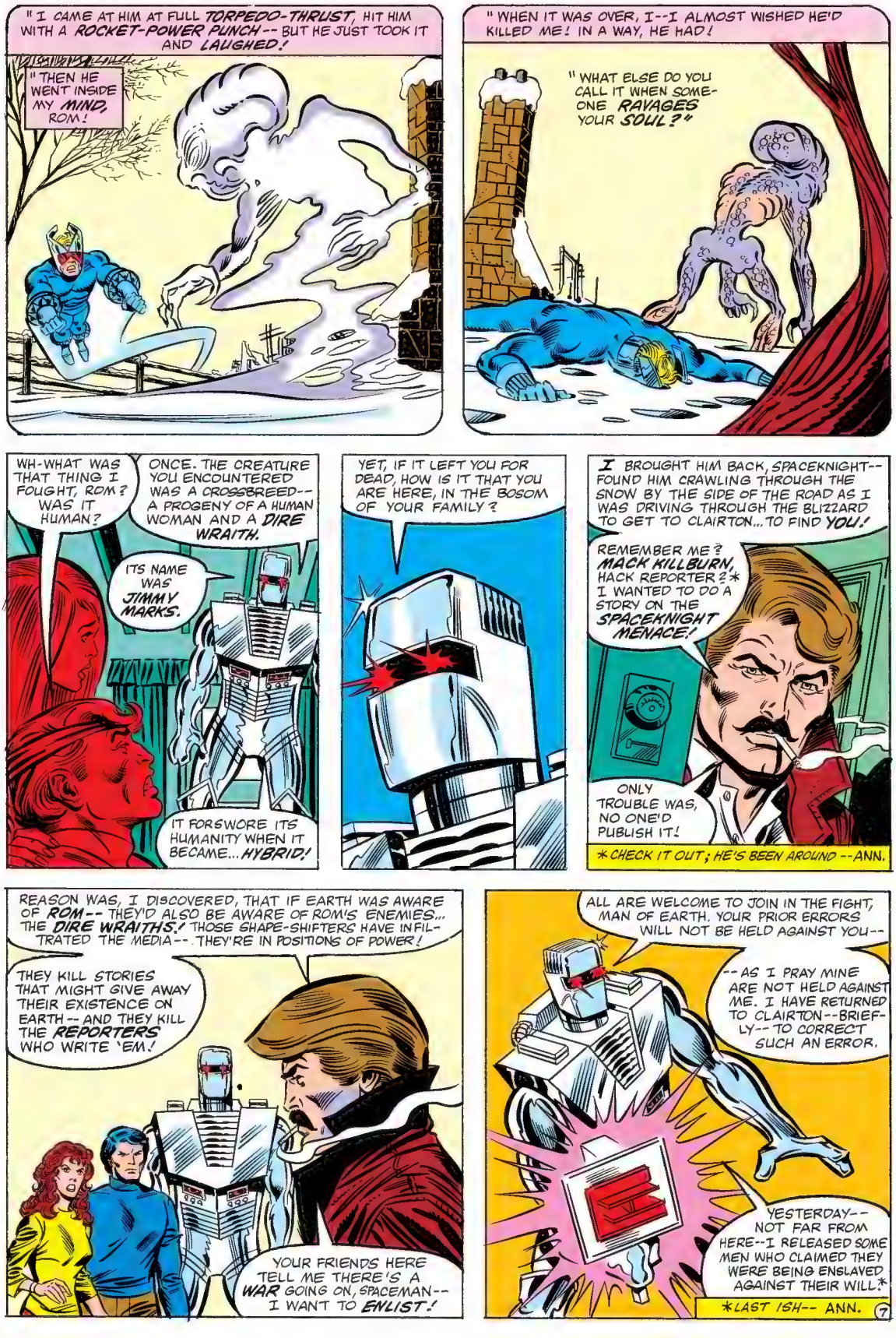
IF YA'VE HURT RAVEN, YA HULKIN' HORROR, AH SWEAR AH'LL STRIP YER SLIMEY SKIN OFF YER SKELETON!
BRRAKK!

THERE! CRAWLIN' YER WAY UP OUTTA THE BASEMENT SHOULD HOLD YA--
--WHILE I RESCUE RAVEN!

ROGUE, OUR OPPONENT IS NOT HUMAN!
YOU'RE TELLIN' ME, MYSTY, HONEY? THAT NIGHTMARE'S RIGHT OUTTA THIS HEAH WORLD!
THAT'S TRUE...BY ACCIDENT OF BIRTH--
4


--THIS BEING WHO CALLS HIMSELF HYBRID IS SOME MANNER OF MUTANT.. AS WE ARE!
HE AIN'T ANYTHIN' LIKE ME!
HUSH, CHILD. IF RAVEN IS RIGHT--
--WE MAY HAVE FOUND OURSELVES AN ALLY TO COMBAT ROM WHO EVEN NOW SEARCHES FOR US THROUGH THE SNOWS.
ABLE TO "SEE" THE FUTURE, DESTINY KNOWS...
... AND THE NAME SHE HAS UTTERED HALTS HYBRID IN HIS TRACKS.
YOU, TOO, HAVE FOUGHT ROM?
ROM, WHO, WITH THE X-MEN, IS MY MOST HATED FOE?!
THEY ARE OUR ENEMIES, TOO, HYBRID!
NO ONE HATES ROM AS I DO!
IT WAS ROM'S NEUTRALIZER-- A WEAPON USED TO BANISH DIRE WRAITHS FROM EARTH BY DISPATCHING THEM THROUGH THE DIMENSIONAL PORTAL TO LIMBO-- THAT DEFEATED ME WHEN FIRST WE FOUGHT.
AT ITS MOST LETHAL SETTING, IT REDUCED ME TO ATOMS AND SCATTERED ME THROUGHOUT SPACE!
THE PAIN WAS ALMOST UNBEARABLE BUT, BY SHEER FORCE OF WILL I RECONSTITUTED MYSELF!
NOW I AM BACK, AND I CRAVE REVENGE!
I PROPOSE AN ALLIANCE AGAINST OUR COMMON FOE.
US WITH... HIM?
SLAY ROM TOGETHER? WHY NOT? SO LONG AS HE SUFFERS AS I SUFFERED, I CARE NOT HOW HE IS BROUGHT TO HEEL!
YET HOW WILL OUR ALLIANCE FARE ONCE VICTORY IS OURS?
HYBRID'S INHUMANNESS MAKES THE FUTURE DIFFICULT TO FORSEE.
5

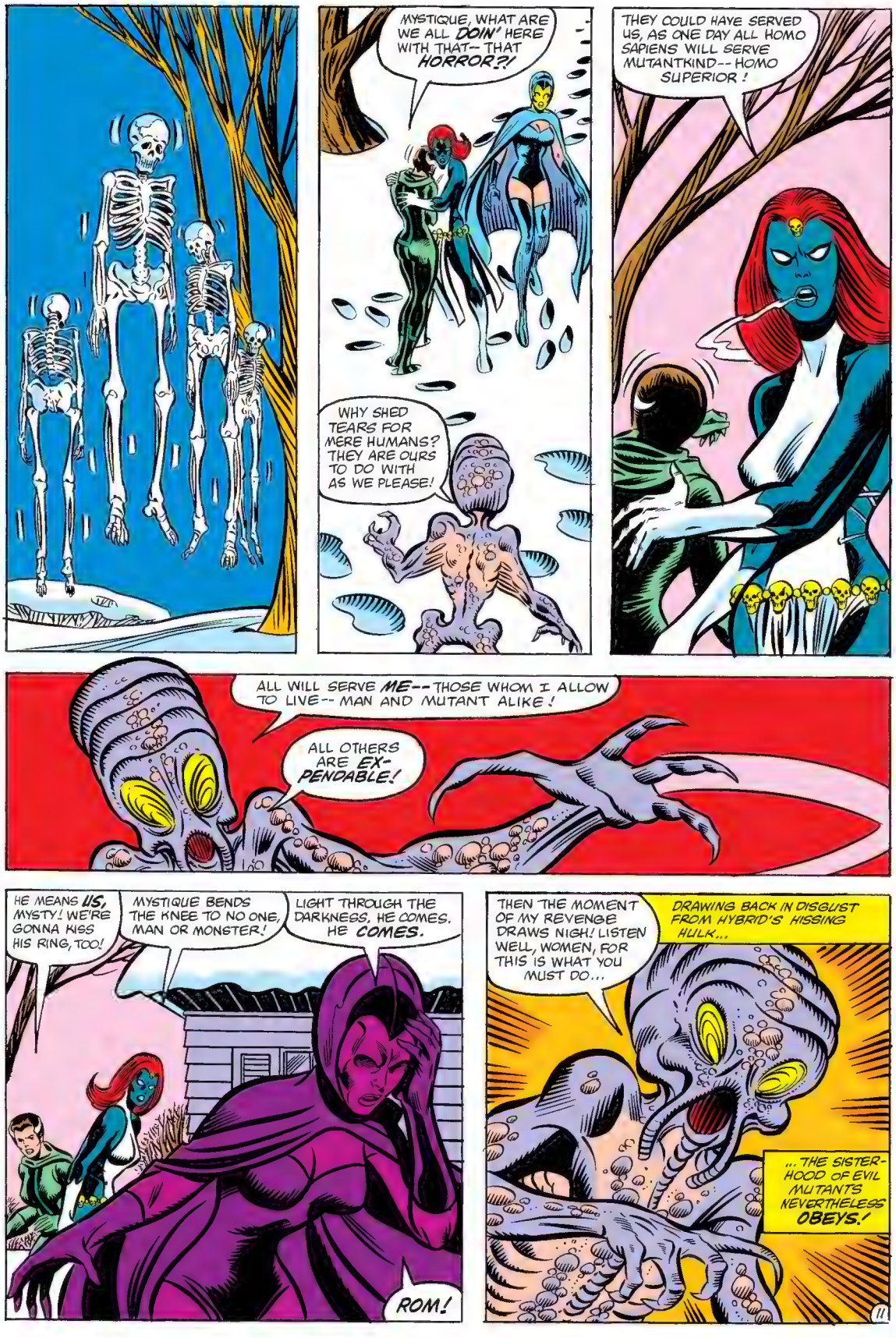

CLAIRTON, WEST VIRGINIA: THE VOICE IS THAT OF BROCK JONES, ALSO KNOWN AS THE TITANIC TORPEDO...
I--I WAS FLYING PATROL BACK IN THE HILLS, TESTING OUT MY NEW WRAITH-DETECTOR VISOR--
--WHEN SOMETHING MATERIALIZED OUT OF THE SNOW NEAR THE OLD MARKS PLACE!
SOMETHING HORRIBLE!
YOU FOUGHT IT, BROCK?
HE SAYS HE GAVE IT HIS BEST SHOT, BRANDY.
HUSH, BROCK DARLING, REST NOW.
IT WASN'T GOOD ENOUGH, STEVE. THE THING TORE INTO ME--TOYED WITH ME--AND LEFT ME FOR DEAD!
IS DADDY GOING TO BE ALL RIGHT?
YES, HONEY. YOUR DADDY WILL BE JUST FINE.
SOMEWHAT APART FROM THE OTHERS, BRANDY CLARK AND STEVE JACKSON SHARE THE REALIZATION THAT A NIGHTMARE HAS RETURNED TO CLAIRTON.
ROM ONCE FOUGHT SOMETHING HORRIBLE AT THE MARKS FARM, STEVE--SOMETHING THAT KILLED JACOB, MARJORIE AND JIMMY MARKS.
YEAH, BUT ROM NEVER TOLD US WHAT IT WAS HE FOUGHT--ONLY THAT HE BEAT IT! *
IF WHATEVER IT WAS IS BACK NOW THAT ROM'S AWAY...!
THE HORROR WILL BE DEALT WITH, STEVE JACKSON.
*SEE ROM #18 AGAIN; IT'S GOOD READING--ANN.
HAVE NO FEAR ON THAT SCORE.
HE DWARFS THE ROOM INTO WHICH HE ENTERS. TO SEE HIM CLEARLY, THOSE ASSEMBLED MUST SHIELD THEIR EYES AGAINST THE GLINT OF HIS ARMOR.
HE IS ROM, SPACE-KNIGHT--AND, FOR A TIME, HE IS HOME.
DESCRIBE YOUR ASSAILANT, TORPEDO.
BIG, ROM--STRONG! BUT HE DIDN'T NEED TO TOUCH ME TO LAY ME OUT IN THE SNOW!
6

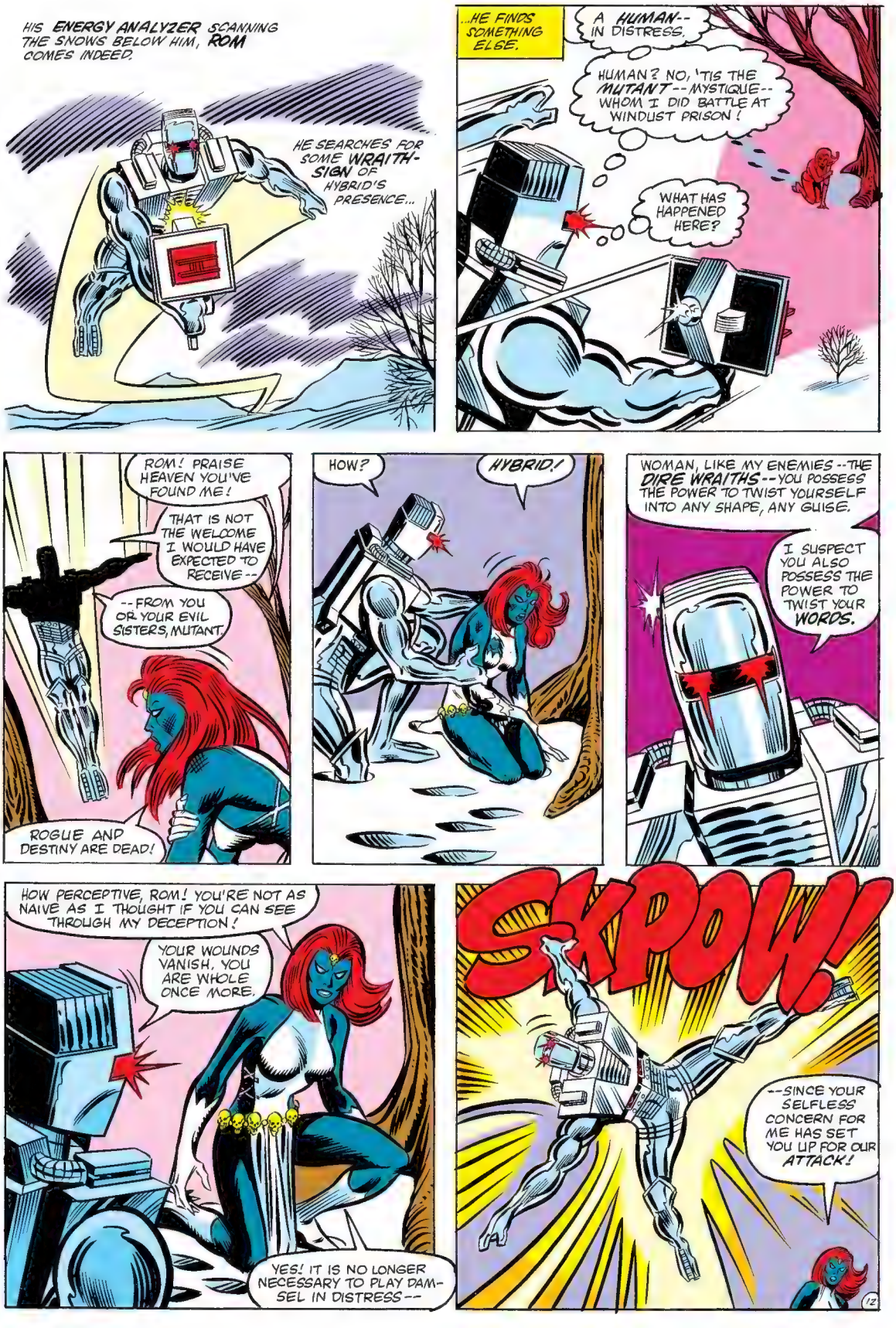

"I CAME AT HIM AT FULL TORPEDO-THRUST, HIT HIM WITH A ROCKET-POWER PUNCH -- BUT HE JUST TOOK IT AND LAUGHED!
"THEN HE WENT INSIDE MY MIND, ROM!
"WHEN IT WAS OVER, I--I ALMOST WISHED HE'D KILLED ME! IN A WAY, HE HAD!
"WHAT ELSE DO YOU CALL IT WHEN SOMEONE RAVAGES YOUR SOUL?"
WH-WHAT WAS THAT THING I FOUGHT, ROM? WAS IT HUMAN?
ONCE. THE CREATURE YOU ENCOUNTERED WAS A CROSSBREED--A PROGENY OF A HUMAN WOMAN AND A DIRE WRAITH.
ITS NAME WAS JIMMY MARKS.
IT FORSWORE ITS HUMANITY WHEN IT BECAME... HYBRID!
YET, IF IT LEFT YOU FOR DEAD, HOW IS IT THAT YOU ARE HERE, IN THE BOSOM OF YOUR FAMILY?
I BROUGHT HIM BACK, SPACEKNIGHT--FOUND HIM CRAWLING THROUGH THE SNOW BY THE SIDE OF THE ROAD AS I WAS DRIVING THROUGH THE BLIZZARD TO GET TO CLAIRTON... TO FIND YOU!
REMEMBER ME? MACK KILLBURN, HACK REPORTER?* I WANTED TO DO A STORY ON THE SPACEKNIGHT MENACE!
ONLY TROUBLE WAS, NO ONE'D PUBLISH IT!
*CHECK IT OUT; HE'S BEEN AROUND --ANN.
REASON WAS, I DISCOVERED, THAT IF EARTH WAS AWARE OF ROM -- THEY'D ALSO BE AWARE OF ROM'S ENEMIES... THE DIRE WRAITHS! THOSE SHAPE-SHIFTERS HAVE INFILTRATED THE MEDIA -- THEY'RE IN POSITIONS OF POWER!
THEY KILL STORIES THAT MIGHT GIVE AWAY THEIR EXISTENCE ON EARTH -- AND THEY KILL THE REPORTERS WHO WRITE 'EM!
YOUR FRIENDS HERE TELL ME THERE'S A WAR GOING ON, SPACEMAN--I WANT TO ENLIST!
ALL ARE WELCOME TO JOIN IN THE FIGHT, MAN OF EARTH. YOUR PRIOR ERRORS WILL NOT BE HELD AGAINST YOU--
--AS I PRAY MINE ARE NOT HELD AGAINST ME. I HAVE RETURNED TO CLAIRTON--BRIEFLY--TO CORRECT SUCH AN ERROR.
YESTERDAY--NOT FAR FROM HERE--I RELEASED SOME MEN WHO CLAIMED THEY WERE BEING ENSLAVED AGAINST THEIR WILL.*
*LAST ISH-- ANN.
7

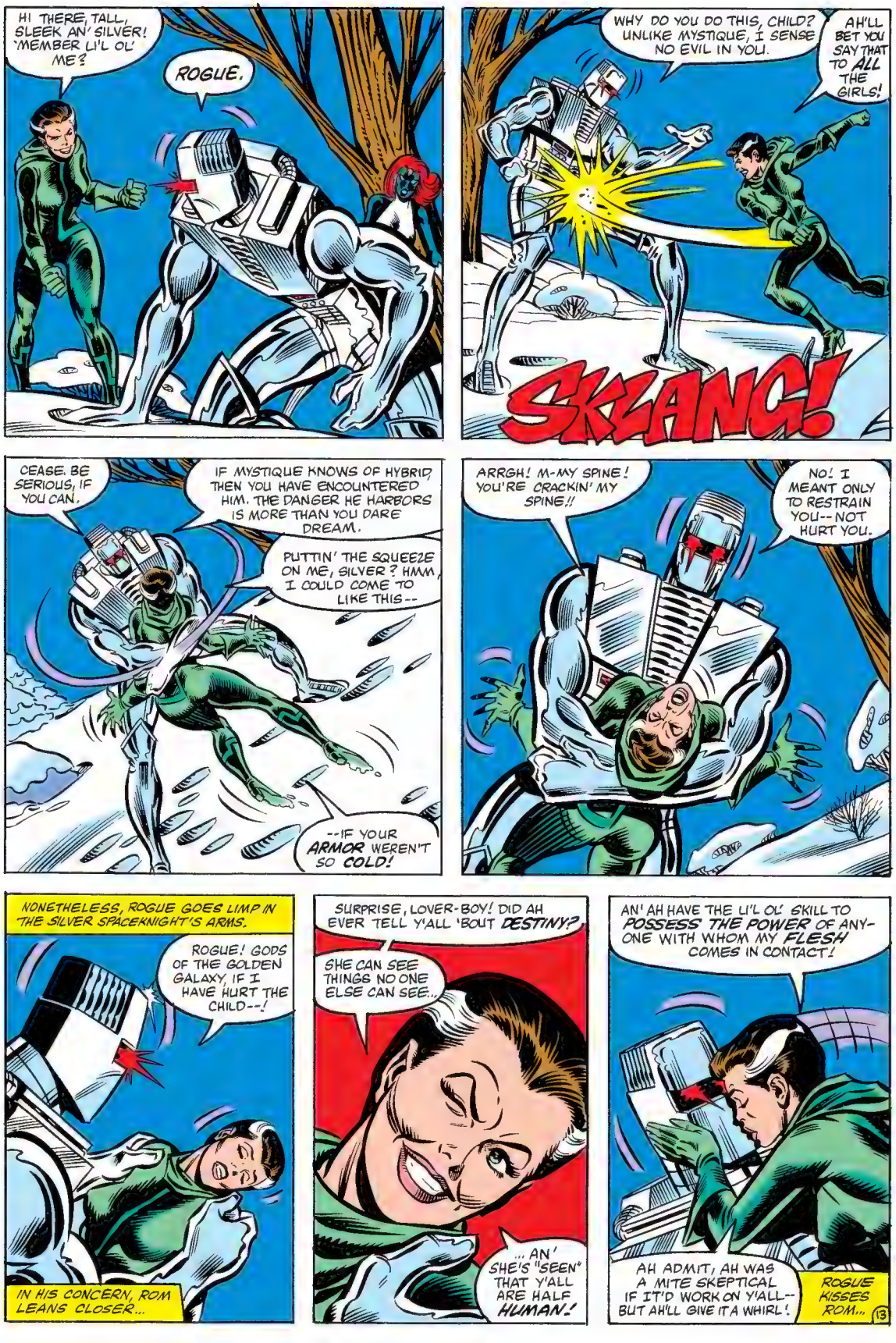
I LATER LEARNED THAT THEY WERE CONVICTS--CRIMINALS WHOSE DESPERATE ACTS HAD MADE THEM A MENACE TO SOCIETY.
IN ADDITION, THREE SUPER-POWERED BEINGS ESCAPED FROM PRISON DUE TO MY IGNORANCE. ALL MUST BE FOUND.
BUT HYBRID IS BY FAR THE GREATEST PERIL AND MUST BE DEALT WITH FIRST.
THEN YOU'RE NOT BACK PERMANENTLY?
GOOD!
SOME LOUSY GUARDIAN OF CLAIRTON I AM! YOU MIGHT AS WELL HAVE LEFT THE GIRL SCOUTS TO LOOK OUT FOR THIS PLACE IN YOUR ABSENCE, ROM!
BUT, IF YOU'RE GOING UP AGAINST HYBRID, I WANT ANOTHER SHOT AT THAT HORROR--! ARRGHH!
DADDY, NO!
DON'T GO, DADDY--PLEASE!
BROCK JONES, YOU HAVE A FAMILY TO THINK OF--AND, AS FAR AS I KNOW, NO ONE PAYS INSURANCE TO THE NEXT-OF-KIN OF DEAD SUPER HEROES.
STAY HERE, DADDY!
BUT, I HAVE TO GO...!
PLEASE!
NO, TORPEDO--YOU ARE HURT, AND HYBRID IS BEYOND BEING AFFECTED BY POWER SUCH AS YOURS. HE AND I ARE OLD ENEMIES. CONFRONTING HIM IS A TASK I HAD BETTER UNDERTAKE ALONE.
M-MUST YOU DO EVERYTHING... ALONE... ROM?
I AM BEGINNING TO ACCEPT SOLITUDE AS MY NATURAL STATE, BRANDY CLARK.
IT DOESN'T HAVE TO BE, ROM.
CRIPES, WHY DOESN'T BRANDY JUST GET DOWN ON HER KNEES AND PROPOSE TO THE SILVER SPACEMAN?
HEY, BRANDY--I'M YOUR BOY-FRIEND, REMEMBER? ME? STEVE?
BLAST IT, I THOUGHT ROM WAS OUT OF OUR LIVES FOR GOOD!
ROM IS ANGERED BY THE LONGING STIRRING WITHIN HIS CYBORG BREAST. WERE HE HUMAN, HE WOULD TAKE BRANDY CLARK IN HIS ARMS AND CARRY HER AWAY.
BUT HALF HIS HUMANITY PERISHED ON GALADOR. HE CAN NEVER BE A MAN AGAIN.
OR CAN HE?
8

THAT QUESTION IN ABEYANCE, A STARTLING SLASH OF SILVER SOARS FROM THE TOWN OF CLAIRTON...
...CYBORG EYES SCANNING THE VIRGIN SNOW..
...AS ROM SEEKS SURCEASE FROM SORROW BY SPRINGING INTO ACTION.
NOT FAR AWAY, FOUR ALMOST-FORGOTTEN MINOR PLAYERS IN THIS MAJOR DRAMA FORGE THROUGH THE DRIFTS TOWARD AN APPARENTLY-ABANDONED MANSE...
THEY ARE THE CONVICTS ROM ERRONEOUSLY FREED FROM THEIR CHAINS.
THEY SEEK SHELTER. THEY SHALL FIND... DEATH.
JAPES, LET'S STICK TO THE TREES! WE DON'T WANT NOBODY PHONIN' THE TROOPERS!
I'M SICK OF RUNNIN' AN' HIDIN,' MAYBERRY! I WANNA GET IN OUTTA THE COLD,,, AN' THIS PLACE IS AS GOOD AS ANY!
I ONCE HOLED UP IN A PLACE LIKE THIS-- HAD FUN WITH AN ENTIRE FAMILY BEFORE I BLEW 'EM ALL AWAY!
HEY! COME SEE WHAT I SEE?
BROADS!
WHAT IS IT, IRENIE, WHAT IS WRONG?
I TOLD YOU I FORESAW DEATH, RAVEN DARKHÖLME, WHEN FIRST WE CAME TO THIS PLACE.
THAT VISION IS ABOUT TO COME TO PASS.
IN THE ACT OF LICKING THEIR LEERING LIPS, THE QUARTET OF CONVICTS IS SUDDENLY SWEPT OFF THEIR FEET...
H-HEY! WHAT'S HAPPENIN' TO US?!
YOU HAVE BEEN LEVITATED TO POSITIONS WHERE I CAN EXPLORE YOUR FEEBLE MINDS, HUMANS!
JAPES, WHAT KIND OF MOTHER-LOVIN' MONSTER IS THAT?!
9

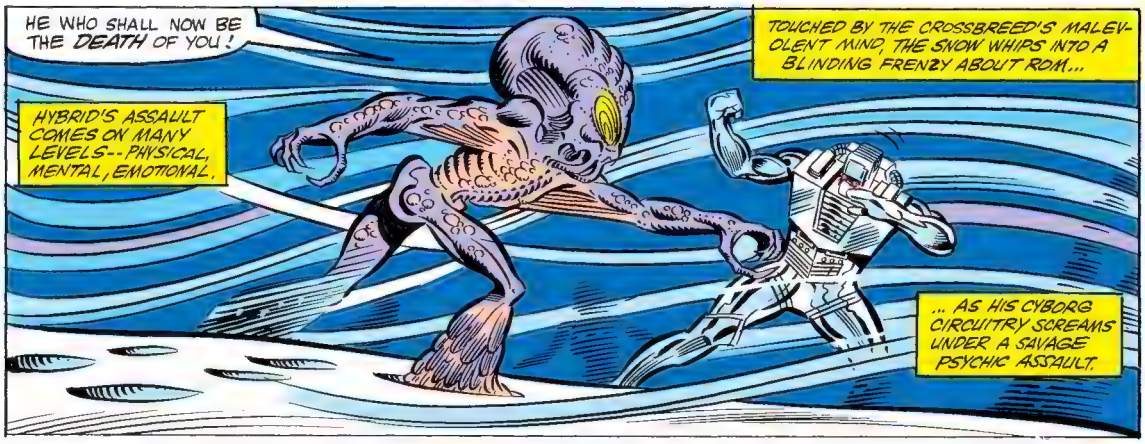
MONSTER? YES, I AM THAT--
...THOUGH WHAT I SEE IN YOUR MINDS MAKES MONSTERS, TOO, OF YOU!
THE MYRIAD HORRORS YOU HAVE HEAPED UPON YOUR FELLOW HUMANS--
-- MATCHES IN OBSCENITY ONLY THE HORROR I AM NOW ABOUT TO INFLICT UPON YOU!
PL-PLEASE, WHOEVER-- WHATEVER--YOU ARE! LET US GO! WE'LL GO BACK TO PRISON! HONEST!
WE'LL TURN OURSELVES IN!
FOOLS! I CARE NOT WHO YOU ARE, WHAT YOU HAVE DONE, NOR HOW YOU WOULD ATONE FOR IT! I MERELY NEED YOU TO TEST WHETHER MY POWER HAS ATTAINED ITS PEAK SINCE MY RETURN TO EARTH!
MANIPULATED BY HYBRID'S MIND, THE INCREDULOUS ESCAPEES BEGIN TO WHIRL IN MIDAIR...
...AND WHIRL...
...AND WHIRL...
...AND WHIRL.
ENOUGH!
OH, SWEET MERCIFUL HEAVEN--
DESTINY, THE CREATURE-- IT HAS TAKEN THE HUMANS, AND...
I DO NOT NEED TO SEE, MYSTIQUE ...TO KNOW.


MYSTIQUE, WHAT ARE WE ALL DOIN' HERE WITH THAT-- THAT HORROR?!
WHY SHED TEARS FOR MERE HUMANS? THEY ARE OURS TO DO WITH AS WE PLEASE!
THEY COULD HAVE SERVED US, AS ONE DAY ALL HOMO SAPIENS WILL SERVE MUTANTKIND-- HOMO SUPERIOR!
ALL WILL SERVE ME-- THOSE WHOM I ALLOW TO LIVE-- MAN AND MUTANT ALIKE!
ALL OTHERS ARE EX-PENDABLE!
HE MEANS US, MYSTY! WE'RE GONNA KISS HIS RING, TOO!
MYSTIQUE BENDS THE KNEE TO NO ONE, MAN OR MONSTER!
LIGHT THROUGH THE DARKNESS. HE COMES. HE COMES.
ROM!
THEN THE MOMENT OF MY REVENGE DRAWS NIGH! LISTEN WELL, WOMEN, FOR THIS IS WHAT YOU MUST DO...
DRAWING BACK IN DISGUST FROM HYBRID'S HISSING HULK...
... THE SISTER-HOOD OF EVIL MUTANTS NEVERTHELESS OBEYS!


HIS ENERGY ANALYZER SCANNING THE SNOWS BELOW HIM, ROM COMES INDEED.
HE SEARCHES FOR SOME WRAITH-SIGN OF HYBRID'S PRESENCE...
...HE FINDS SOMETHING ELSE.
A HUMAN-- IN DISTRESS.
HUMAN? NO, 'TIS THE MUTANT--MYSTIQUE--WHOM I DID BATTLE AT WINDUST PRISON!
WHAT HAS HAPPENED HERE?
ROM! PRAISE HEAVEN YOU'VE FOUND ME!
THAT IS NOT THE WELCOME I WOULD HAVE EXPECTED TO RECEIVE--
--FROM YOU OR YOUR EVIL SISTERS, MUTANT.
ROGUE AND DESTINY ARE DEAD!
HOW?
HYBRID!
WOMAN, LIKE MY ENEMIES--THE DIRE WRAITHS--YOU POSSESS THE POWER TO TWIST YOURSELF INTO ANY SHAPE, ANY GUISE.
I SUSPECT YOU ALSO POSSESS THE POWER TO TWIST YOUR WORDS.
HOW PERCEPTIVE, ROM! YOU'RE NOT AS NAIVE AS I THOUGHT IF YOU CAN SEE THROUGH MY DECEPTION!
YOUR WOUNDS VANISH, YOU ARE WHOLE ONCE MORE.
YES! IT IS NO LONGER NECESSARY TO PLAY DAMSEL IN DISTRESS--
SKPOW!
--SINCE YOUR SELFLESS CONCERN FOR ME HAS SET YOU UP FOR OUR ATTACK!

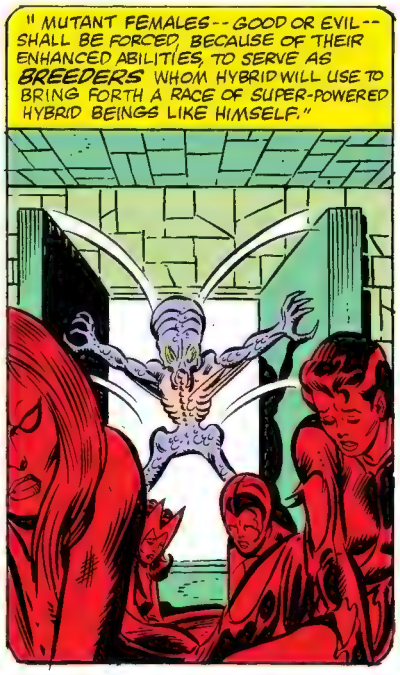

HI THERE, TALL, SLEEK AN' SILVER! 'MEMBER LI'L OL' ME?
ROGUE.
WHY DO YOU DO THIS, CHILD? UNLIKE MYSTIQUE, I SENSE NO EVIL IN YOU.
AH'LL BET YOU SAY THAT TO ALL THE GIRLS!
SKLANG!
CEASE. BE SERIOUS, IF YOU CAN.
IF MYSTIQUE KNOWS OF HYBRID, THEN YOU HAVE ENCOUNTERED HIM. THE DANGER HE HARBORS IS MORE THAN YOU DARE DREAM.
PUTTIN' THE SQUEEZE ON ME, SILVER? HMM, I COULD COME TO LIKE THIS--
--IF YOUR ARMOR WEREN'T SO COLD!
ARRGH! M-MY SPINE! YOU'RE CRACKIN' MY SPINE!!
NO! I MEANT ONLY TO RESTRAIN YOU-- NOT HURT YOU.
NONETHELESS, ROGUE GOES LIMP IN THE SILVER SPACEKNIGHT'S ARMS.
ROGUE! GODS OF THE GOLDEN GALAXY, IF I HAVE HURT THE CHILD--!
IN HIS CONCERN, ROM LEANS CLOSER...
SURPRISE, LOVER-BOY! DID AH EVER TELL Y'ALL 'BOUT DESTINY?
SHE CAN SEE THINGS NO ONE ELSE CAN SEE...
... AN' SHE'S "SEEN" THAT Y'ALL ARE HALF HUMAN!
AN' AH HAVE THE LI'L OL' SKILL TO POSSESS THE POWER OF ANY-ONE WITH WHOM MY FLESH COMES IN CONTACT!
AH ADMIT, AH WAS A MITE SKEPTICAL IF IT'D WORK ON Y'ALL-- BUT AH'LL GIVE IT A WHIRL!
ROGUE KISSES ROM...
13

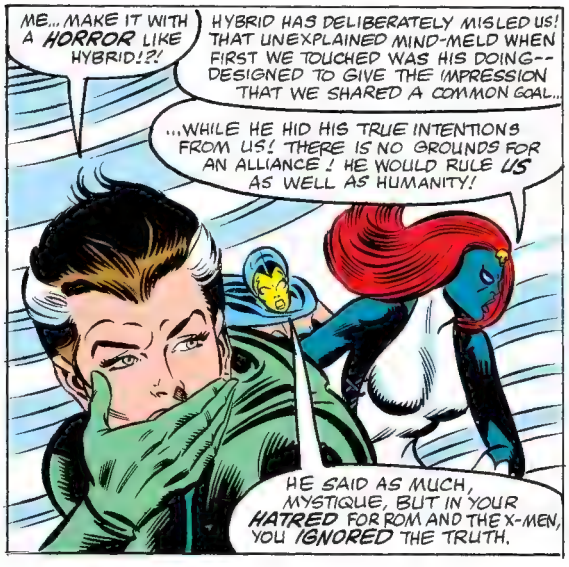
... AND BOTH EXPERIENCE SOMETHING NEITHER HAS EVER EXPERIENCED BEFORE.
OH, MY GOODNESS--!
AFTER A MOMENT'S IMMOBILITY, ROM TEARS ROGUE FROM HIS BREAST.
CURSE YOU, CHILD. YOU AWAKEN IN ME EMOTIONS I DARE NOT FEEL, SINCE I MAY NEVER BE HUMAN AGAIN!
THE AGONY YOU CAUSE ME MAKES YOU AS EVIL AS YOUR SISTERS.
BUT...
WHAT IS THERE ROGUE CAN SAY? SHE ATTEMPTED TO ABSORB ROM'S POWER, ONLY TO DISCOVER THAT THAT PORTION OF HUMANITY GRAFTED TO THE COLD SPACEKNIGHT ARMOR POSSESSED NO POWER...
...BUT ONLY A KIND OF DECENCY WHICH ROGUE, IN HER YOUNG LIFE, HAS NEVER KNOWN.
SHE FINDS THAT SHE... LIKES IT.
AS BOTH STAND AWED BY THE EMOTIONAL EMPATHY THEY'VE MOMENTARILY SHARED, MYSTIQUE AND DESTINY ENCIRCLE ROM...
...AND SOMETHING RISES UP FROM THE SNOW EMBANKMENT BEHIND HIM...
SOMETHING EVIL!
HYBRID!
YES, ROM-- HYBRID! HE WHOM YOU THOUGHT YOU'D SLAIN!


HE WHO SHALL NOW BE THE DEATH OF YOU!
HYBRID'S ASSAULT COMES ON MANY LEVELS--PHYSICAL, MENTAL, EMOTIONAL.
TOUCHED BY THE CROSSBREED'S MALEVOLENT MIND, THE SNOW WHIPS INTO A BLINDING FRENZY ABOUT ROM...
... AS HIS CYBORG CIRCUITRY SCREAMS UNDER A SAVAGE PSYCHIC ASSAULT.

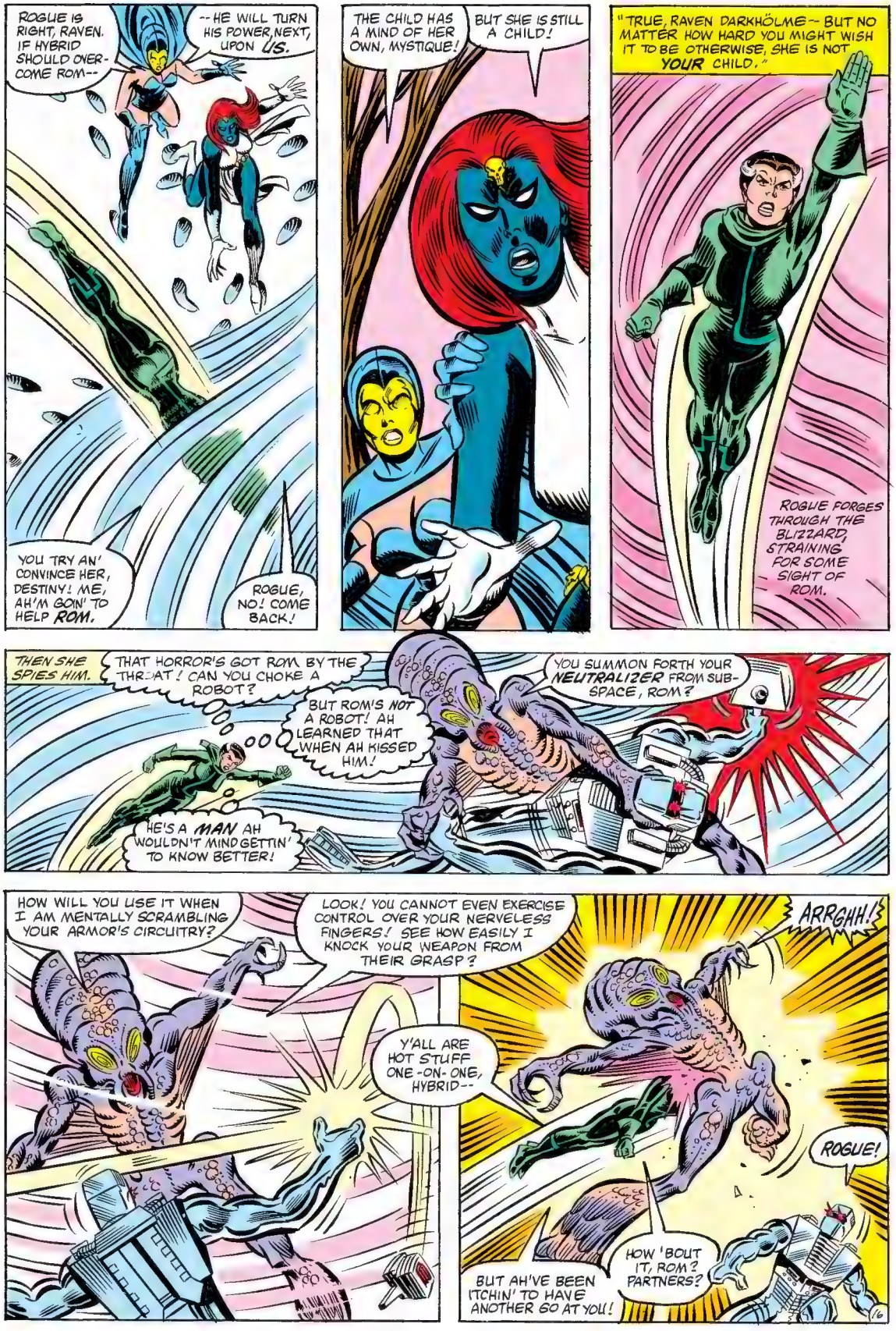
MYSTIQUE--WE CAN'T LET THAT HORROR HURT ROM!
ARE YOU MAD, ROGUE? THAT'S PRECISELY WHAT WE PLANNED!
BUT ROM'S GOOD--NOBLE!
SO ARE THE AVENGERS AND THE X-MEN--GOOD AND NOBLE--BUT THEY SIDE WITH HUMANITY AGAINST MUTANTKIND!

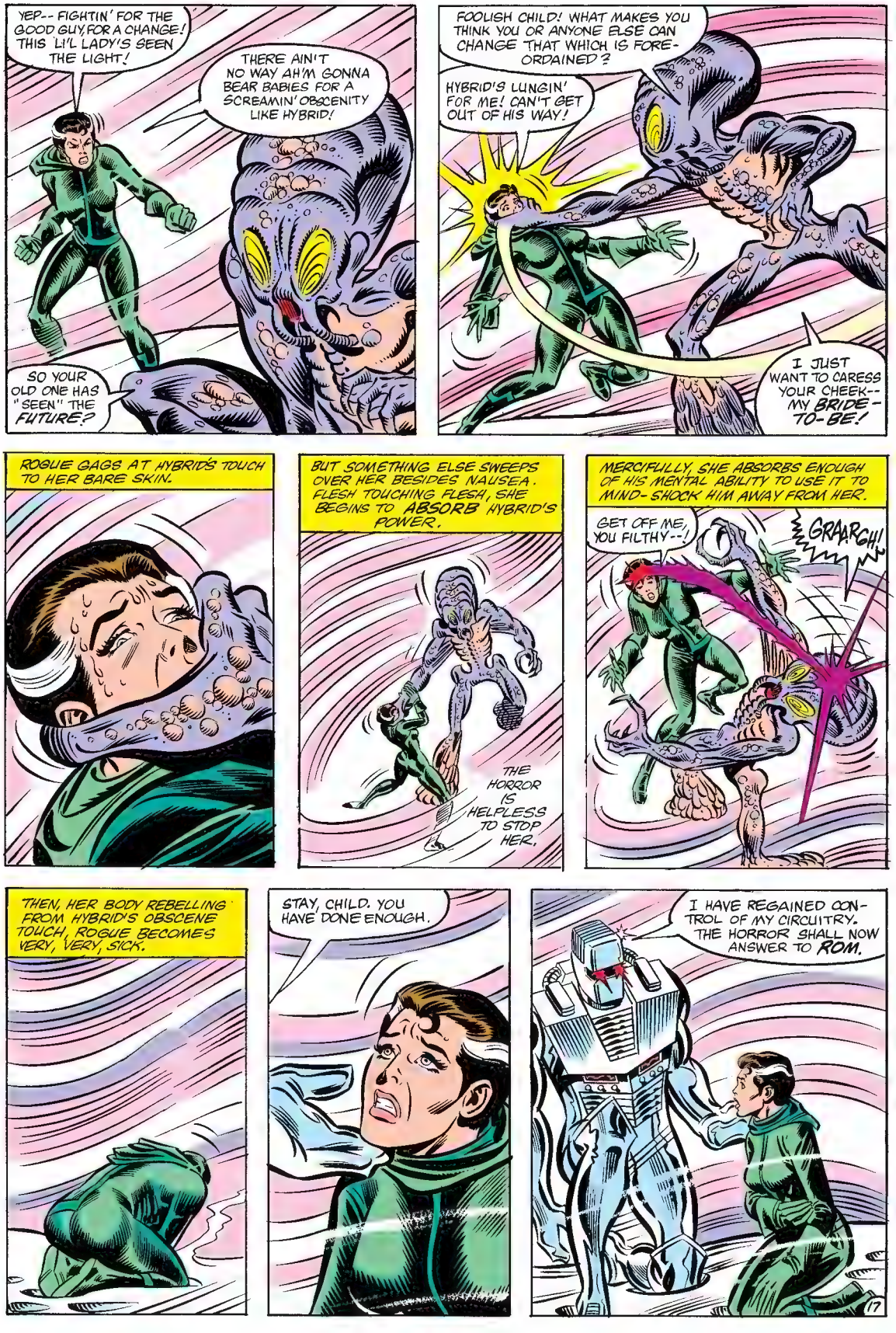
MYSTIQUE, AS HYBRID ASSAULTS ROM, HIS MENTAL BLOCKING OF MY ABILITY TO "SEE" THE FUTURE WANES.
AND WHAT DO YOU "SEE" DESTINY?
WHAT HYBRID INTENDS... FOR US.

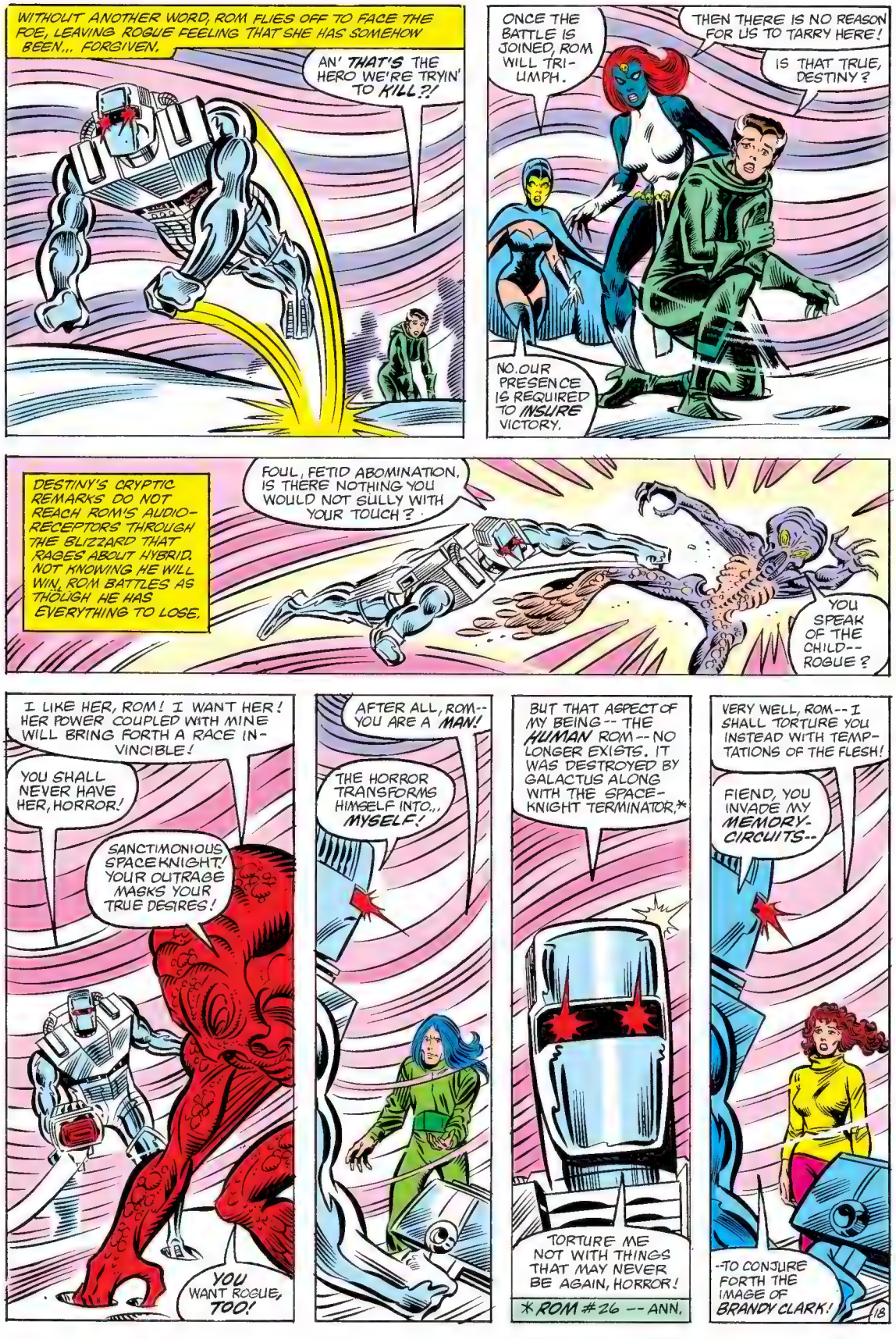

"MUTANT FEMALES--GOOD OR EVIL--SHALL BE FORCED, BECAUSE OF THEIR ENHANCED ABILITIES, TO SERVE AS BREEDERS WHOM HYBRID WILL USE TO BRING FORTH A RACE OF SUPER-POWERED HYBRID BEINGS LIKE HIMSELF."

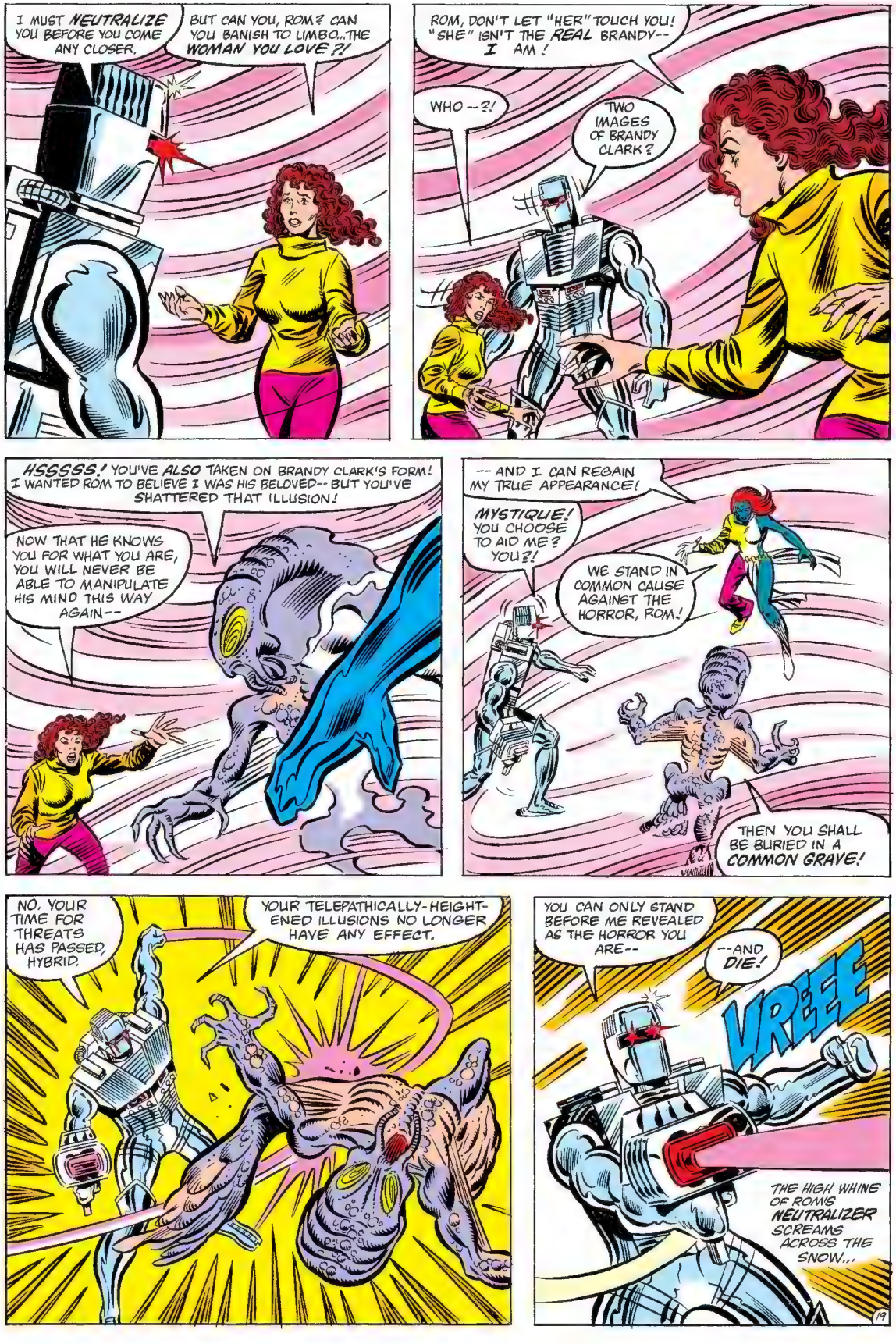

ME... MAKE IT WITH A HORROR LIKE HYBRID!?!
HYBRID HAS DELIBERATELY MISLED US! THAT UNEXPLAINED MIND-MELD WHEN FIRST WE TOUCHED WAS HIS DOING--DESIGNED TO GIVE THE IMPRESSION THAT WE SHARED A COMMON GOAL.
...WHILE HE HID HIS TRUE INTENTIONS FROM US! THERE IS NO GROUNDS FOR AN ALLIANCE! HE WOULD RULE US AS WELL AS HUMANITY!
HE SAID AS MUCH, MYSTIQUE, BUT IN YOUR HATRED FOR ROM AND THE X-MEN, YOU IGNORED THE TRUTH.

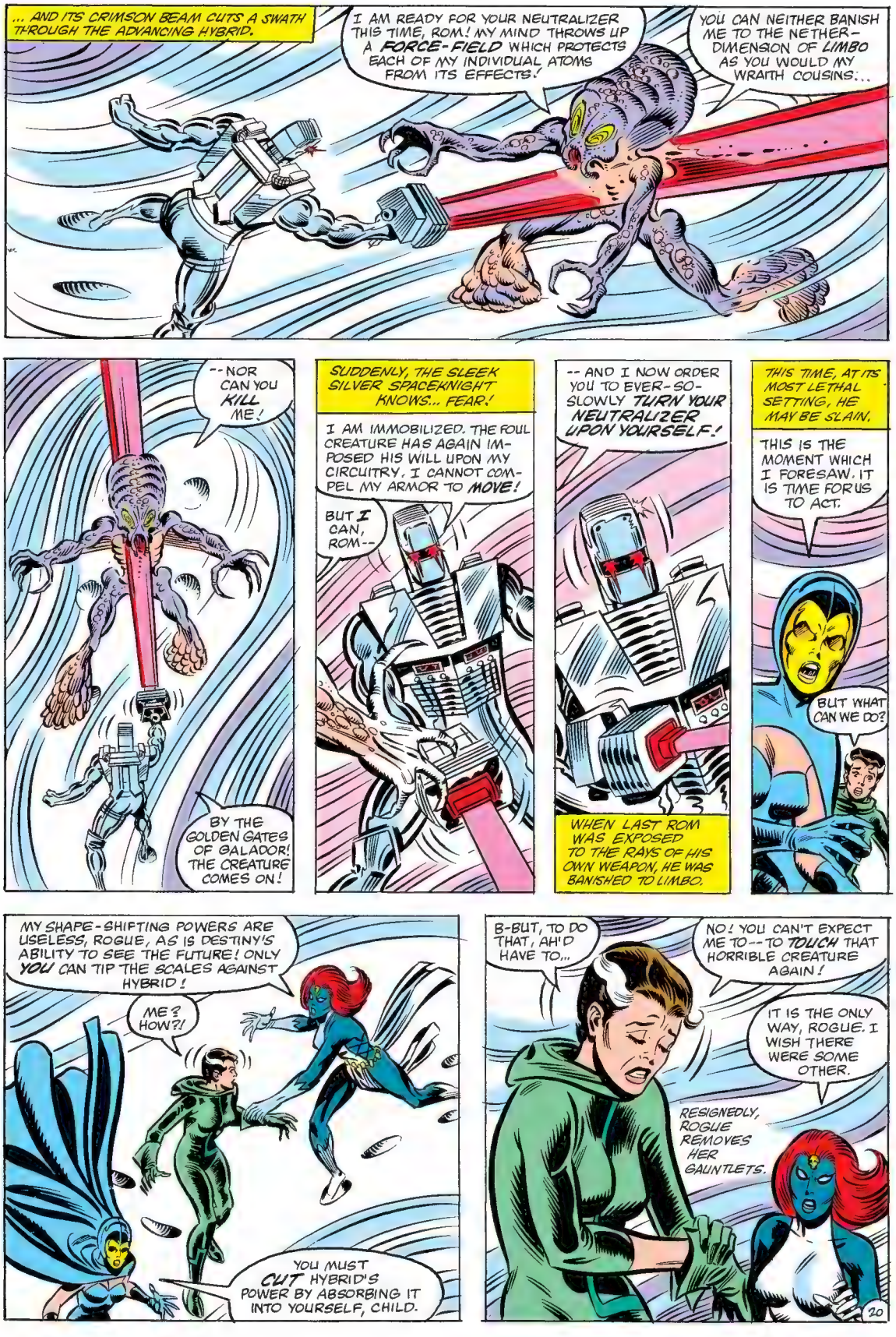
NEVER, RAVEN DARKHÖLME. I MERELY SUGGEST WE PLOT A NEW COURSE OF ACTION.
DO NOT LECTURE ME, IRENE!
WE LEAVE... AND LET HYBRID AND ROM DESTROY EACH OTHER!
LEAVE ROM? NO! WE'VE GOTTA HELP HIM!
ROGUE, NEED I REMIND YOU THAT WE ARE EVIL MUTANTS?
15

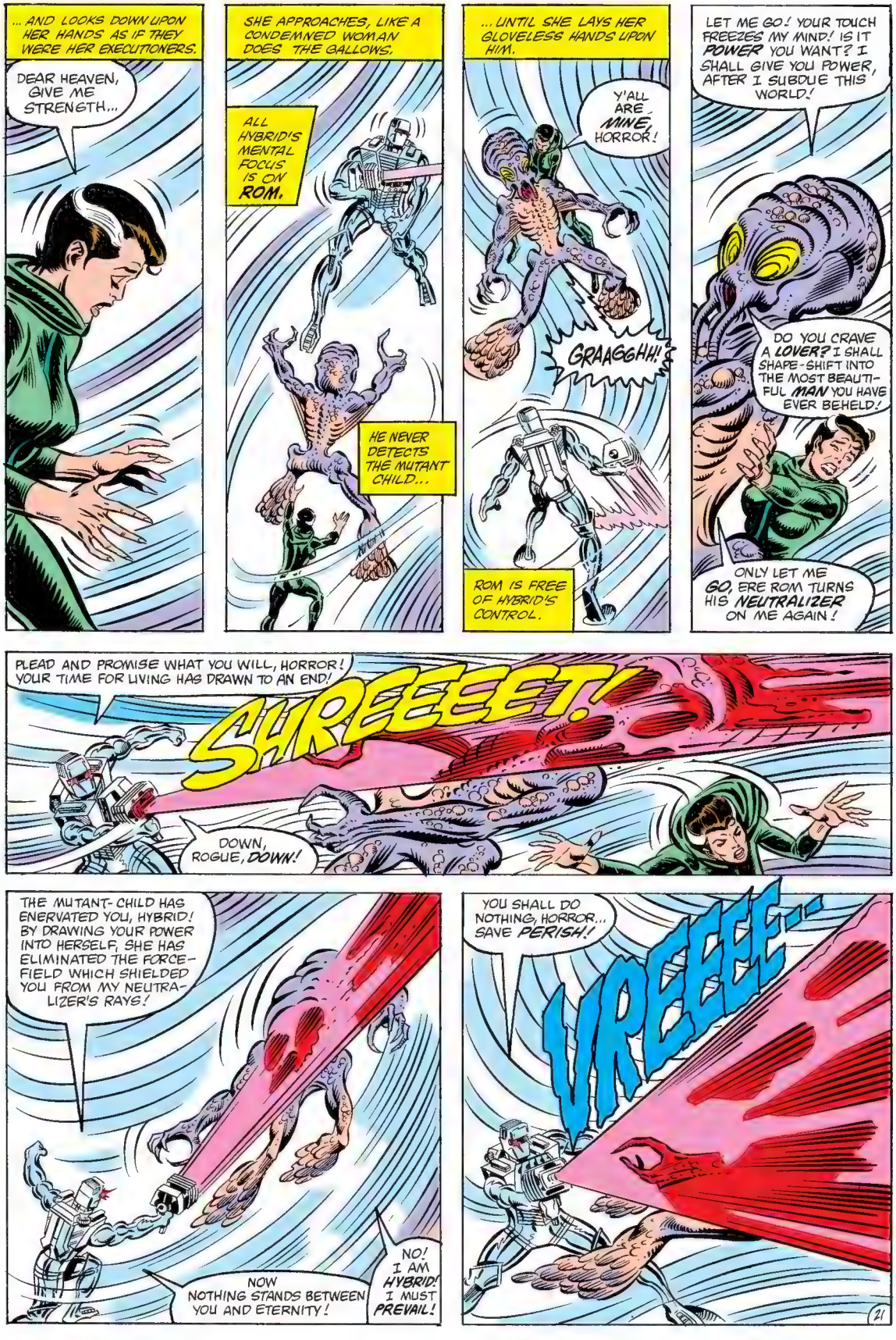

ROGUE IS RIGHT, RAVEN. IF HYBRID SHOULD OVERCOME ROM--
--HE WILL TURN HIS POWER, NEXT, UPON US.
YOU TRY AN' CONVINCE HER, DESTINY! ME, AH'M GOIN' TO HELP ROM.
ROGUE, NO! COME BACK!
THE CHILD HAS A MIND OF HER OWN, MYSTIQUE!
BUT SHE IS STILL A CHILD!
"TRUE, RAVEN DARKHÖLME -- BUT NO MATTER HOW HARD YOU MIGHT WISH IT TO BE OTHERWISE, SHE IS NOT YOUR CHILD."
ROGUE FORGES THROUGH THE BLIZZARD, STRAINING FOR SOME SIGHT OF ROM.
THEN SHE SPIES HIM.
THAT HORROR'S GOT ROM BY THE THROAT! CAN YOU CHOKE A ROBOT?
BUT ROM'S NOT A ROBOT! AH LEARNED THAT WHEN AH KISSED HIM!
HE'S A MAN AH WOULDN'T MIND GETTIN' TO KNOW BETTER!
YOU SUMMON FORTH YOUR NEUTRALIZER FROM SUB-SPACE, ROM?
HOW WILL YOU USE IT WHEN I AM MENTALLY SCRAMBLING YOUR ARMOR'S CIRCUITRY?
LOOK! YOU CANNOT EVEN EXERCISE CONTROL OVER YOUR NERVELESS FINGERS! SEE HOW EASILY I KNOCK YOUR WEAPON FROM THEIR GRASP?
Y'ALL ARE HOT STUFF ONE-ON-ONE, HYBRID--
ARRGHH!
ROGUE!
HOW 'BOUT IT, ROM? PARTNERS?
BUT AH'VE BEEN ITCHIN' TO HAVE ANOTHER GO AT YOU!
16

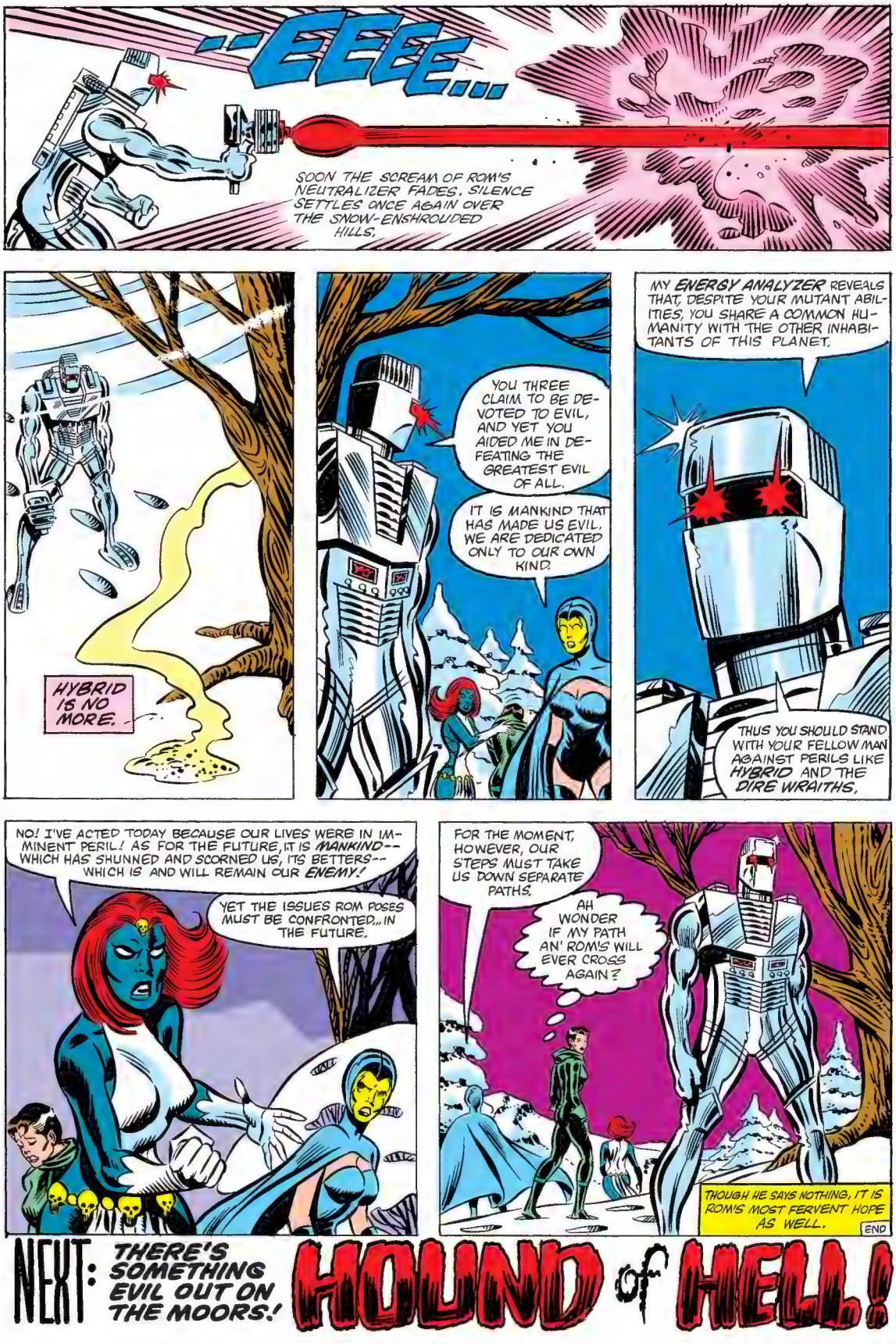

YEP-- FIGHTIN' FOR THE GOOD GUY, FOR A CHANGE! THIS LI'L LADY'S SEEN THE LIGHT!
THERE AIN'T NO WAY AH'M GONNA BEAR BABIES FOR A SCREAMIN' OBSCENITY LIKE HYBRID!
SO YOUR OLD ONE HAS "SEEN" THE FUTURE?
FOOLISH CHILD! WHAT MAKES YOU THINK YOU OR ANYONE ELSE CAN CHANGE THAT WHICH IS FORE-ORDAINED?
HYBRID'S LUNGIN' FOR ME! CAN'T GET OUT OF HIS WAY!
I JUST WANT TO CARESS YOUR CHEEK-- MY BRIDE-TO-BE!
ROGUE GAGS AT HYBRID'S TOUCH TO HER BARE SKIN.
BUT SOMETHING ELSE SWEEPS OVER HER BESIDES NAUSEA. FLESH TOUCHING FLESH, SHE BEGINS TO ABSORB HYBRID'S POWER.
THE HORROR IS HELPLESS TO STOP HER.
MERCIFULLY, SHE ABSORBS ENOUGH OF HIS MENTAL ABILITY TO USE IT TO MIND-SHOCK HIM AWAY FROM HER.
GET OFF ME, YOU FILTHY--!
GRAARGH!
THEN, HER BODY REBELLING FROM HYBRID'S OBSCENE TOUCH, ROGUE BECOMES VERY, VERY, SICK.
STAY, CHILD. YOU HAVE DONE ENOUGH.
I HAVE REGAINED CONTROL OF MY CIRCUITRY. THE HORROR SHALL NOW ANSWER TO ROM.
17


WITHOUT ANOTHER WORD, ROM FLIES OFF TO FACE THE FOE, LEAVING ROGUE FEELING THAT SHE HAS SOMEHOW BEEN... FORGIVEN.
AN' THAT'S THE HERO WE'RE TRYIN' TO KILL?!
ONCE THE BATTLE IS JOINED, ROM WILL TRIUMPH.
THEN THERE IS NO REASON FOR US TO TARRY HERE!
IS THAT TRUE, DESTINY?
NO. OUR PRESENCE IS REQUIRED TO INSURE VICTORY.
DESTINY'S CRYPTIC REMARKS DO NOT REACH ROM'S AUDIO-RECEPTORS THROUGH THE BLIZZARD THAT RAGES ABOUT HYBRID. NOT KNOWING HE WILL WIN, ROM BATTLES AS THOUGH HE HAS EVERYTHING TO LOSE.
FOUL, FETID ABOMINATION, IS THERE NOTHING YOU WOULD NOT SULLY WITH YOUR TOUCH?
YOU SPEAK OF THE CHILD-- ROGUE?
I LIKE HER, ROM! I WANT HER! HER POWER COUPLED WITH MINE WILL BRING FORTH A RACE INVINCIBLE!
YOU SHALL NEVER HAVE HER, HORROR!
SANCTIMONIOUS SPACEKNIGHT! YOUR OUTRAGE MASKS YOUR TRUE DESIRES!
YOU WANT ROGUE, TOO!
AFTER ALL, ROM-- YOU ARE A MAN!
THE HORROR TRANSFORMS HIMSELF INTO... MYSELF!
BUT THAT ASPECT OF MY BEING -- THE HUMAN ROM -- NO LONGER EXISTS. IT WAS DESTROYED BY GALACTUS ALONG WITH THE SPACEKNIGHT TERMINATOR,*
TORTURE ME NOT WITH THINGS THAT MAY NEVER BE AGAIN, HORROR!
*ROM #26 -- ANN.
VERY WELL, ROM-- I SHALL TORTURE YOU INSTEAD WITH TEMPTATIONS OF THE FLESH!
FIEND, YOU INVADE MY MEMORY-CIRCUITS--
--TO CONJURE FORTH THE IMAGE OF BRANDY CLARK!
18


I MUST NEUTRALIZE YOU BEFORE YOU COME ANY CLOSER.
BUT CAN YOU, ROM? CAN YOU BANISH TO LIMBO...THE WOMAN YOU LOVE?!
ROM, DON'T LET "HER" TOUCH YOU! "SHE" ISN'T THE REAL BRANDY-- I AM!
WHO --?!
TWO IMAGES OF BRANDY CLARK?
HSSSSS! YOU'VE ALSO TAKEN ON BRANDY CLARK'S FORM! I WANTED ROM TO BELIEVE I WAS HIS BELOVED-- BUT YOU'VE SHATTERED THAT ILLUSION!
NOW THAT HE KNOWS YOU FOR WHAT YOU ARE, YOU WILL NEVER BE ABLE TO MANIPULATE HIS MIND THIS WAY AGAIN--
-- AND I CAN REGAIN MY TRUE APPEARANCE!
MYSTIQUE! YOU CHOOSE TO AID ME? YOU?!
WE STAND IN COMMON CAUSE AGAINST THE HORROR, ROM!
THEN YOU SHALL BE BURIED IN A COMMON GRAVE!
NO. YOUR TIME FOR THREATS HAS PASSED, HYBRID.
YOUR TELEPATHICALLY-HEIGHTENED ILLUSIONS NO LONGER HAVE ANY EFFECT.
YOU CAN ONLY STAND BEFORE ME REVEALED AS THE HORROR YOU ARE--
--AND DIE!
VREEE
THE HIGH WHINE OF ROM'S NEUTRALIZER SCREAMS ACROSS THE SNOW...
19


... AND ITS CRIMSON BEAM CUTS A SWATH THROUGH THE ADVANCING HYBRID.
I AM READY FOR YOUR NEUTRALIZER THIS TIME, ROM! MY MIND THROWS UP A FORCE-FIELD WHICH PROTECTS EACH OF MY INDIVIDUAL ATOMS FROM ITS EFFECTS!
YOU CAN NEITHER BANISH ME TO THE NETHER-DIMENSION OF LIMBO AS YOU WOULD MY WRAITH COUSINS...
--NOR CAN YOU KILL ME!
BY THE GOLDEN GATES OF GALADOR! THE CREATURE COMES ON!
SUDDENLY, THE SLEEK SILVER SPACEKNIGHT KNOWS... FEAR!
I AM IMMOBILIZED. THE FOUL CREATURE HAS AGAIN IMPOSED HIS WILL UPON MY CIRCUITRY. I CANNOT COMPEL MY ARMOR TO MOVE!
BUT I CAN, ROM--
-- AND I NOW ORDER YOU TO EVER-SO-SLOWLY TURN YOUR NEUTRALIZER UPON YOURSELF!
WHEN LAST ROM WAS EXPOSED TO THE RAYS OF HIS OWN WEAPON, HE WAS BANISHED TO LIMBO.
THIS TIME, AT ITS MOST LETHAL SETTING, HE MAY BE SLAIN.
THIS IS THE MOMENT WHICH I FORESAW. IT IS TIME FOR US TO ACT.
BUT WHAT CAN WE DO?
MY SHAPE-SHIFTING POWERS ARE USELESS, ROGUE, AS IS DESTINY'S ABILITY TO SEE THE FUTURE! ONLY YOU CAN TIP THE SCALES AGAINST HYBRID!
ME? HOW?!
YOU MUST CUT HYBRID'S POWER BY ABSORBING IT INTO YOURSELF, CHILD.
B-BUT, TO DO THAT, AH'D HAVE TO...
NO! YOU CAN'T EXPECT ME TO--TO TOUCH THAT HORRIBLE CREATURE AGAIN!
IT IS THE ONLY WAY, ROGUE. I WISH THERE WERE SOME OTHER.
RESIGNEDLY, ROGUE REMOVES HER GAUNTLETS.
20


... AND LOOKS DOWN UPON HER HANDS AS IF THEY WERE HER EXECUTIONERS.
DEAR HEAVEN, GIVE ME STRENGTH...
SHE APPROACHES, LIKE A CONDEMNED WOMAN DOES THE GALLOWS.
ALL HYBRID'S MENTAL FOCUS IS ON ROM.
HE NEVER DETECTS THE MUTANT CHILD...
... UNTIL SHE LAYS HER GLOVELESS HANDS UPON HIM.
Y'ALL ARE MINE, HORROR!
GRAAGGHH!
ROM IS FREE OF HYBRID'S CONTROL.
LET ME GO! YOUR TOUCH FREEZES MY MIND! IS IT POWER YOU WANT? I SHALL GIVE YOU POWER, AFTER I SUBDUE THIS WORLD!
DO YOU CRAVE A LOVER? I SHALL SHAPE-SHIFT INTO THE MOST BEAUTIFUL MAN YOU HAVE EVER BEHELD!
ONLY LET ME GO, ERE ROM TURNS HIS NEUTRALIZER ON ME AGAIN!
PLEAD AND PROMISE WHAT YOU WILL, HORROR! YOUR TIME FOR LIVING HAS DRAWN TO AN END!
SHREEEEET!
DOWN, ROGUE, DOWN!
THE MUTANT-CHILD HAS ENERVATED YOU, HYBRID! BY DRAWING YOUR POWER INTO HERSELF, SHE HAS ELIMINATED THE FORCE-FIELD WHICH SHIELDED YOU FROM MY NEUTRALIZER'S RAYS!
NOW NOTHING STANDS BETWEEN YOU AND ETERNITY!
NO! I AM HYBRID! I MUST PREVAIL!
YOU SHALL DO NOTHING, HORROR... SAVE PERISH!
VREEE-
21


--EEEE...
SOON THE SCREAM OF ROM'S NEUTRALIZER FADES. SILENCE SETTLES ONCE AGAIN OVER THE SNOW-ENSHROUDED HILLS.
HYBRID IS NO MORE.
YOU THREE CLAIM TO BE DEVOTED TO EVIL, AND YET YOU AIDED ME IN DEFEATING THE GREATEST EVIL OF ALL.
IT IS MANKIND THAT HAS MADE US EVIL. WE ARE DEDICATED ONLY TO OUR OWN KIND.
MY ENERGY ANALYZER REVEALS THAT, DESPITE YOUR MUTANT ABILITIES, YOU SHARE A COMMON HUMANITY WITH THE OTHER INHABITANTS OF THIS PLANET.
THUS YOU SHOULD STAND WITH YOUR FELLOW MAN AGAINST PERILS LIKE HYBRID AND THE DIRE WRAITHS.
NO! I'VE ACTED TODAY BECAUSE OUR LIVES WERE IN IMMINENT PERIL! AS FOR THE FUTURE, IT IS MANKIND--WHICH HAS SHUNNED AND SCORNED US, ITS BETTERS--WHICH IS AND WILL REMAIN OUR ENEMY!
YET THE ISSUES ROM POSES MUST BE CONFRONTED... IN THE FUTURE.
FOR THE MOMENT, HOWEVER, OUR STEPS MUST TAKE US DOWN SEPARATE PATHS.
AH WONDER IF MY PATH AN' ROM'S WILL EVER CROSS AGAIN?
THOUGH HE SAYS NOTHING, IT IS ROM'S MOST FERVENT HOPE AS WELL.
END
NEXT: THERE'S SOMETHING EVIL OUT ON THE MOORS!
HOUND of HELL!

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MARVEL® COMICS GROUP
APPROVED BY THE COMICS CODE AUTHORITY
KING-SIZE ANNUAL!
ALL-NEW MARVEL MAYHEM!
ROM
TM
© 1982 MARVEL COMICS GROUP
I'VE STRIPPED YOU OF YOUR ARMOR, SPACEKNIGHT...
...NOW I'LL TAKE YOUR LIFE!
MILGROM

Two-hundred years ago, the evil Dire Wraiths threatened the peace-loving planet, Galador. In their homeworld's darkest hour, a thousand brave, young Galadorians sacrificed humanity itself to become Cyborg Warriors, a last desperate line of defense. Though hopelessly outnumbered, these Spaceknights triumphed, and pursued the remnants of the Wraith horde across the universe. Now, alone in the Enemy's mightiest stronghold, on a backward planet called Earth, one Galadorian Warrior faces his most awesome challenge.

Stan Lee PRESENTS: THE GREATEST OF THE SPACEKNIGHTS--ROM!

IT CAME FROM BEYOND THE STARS

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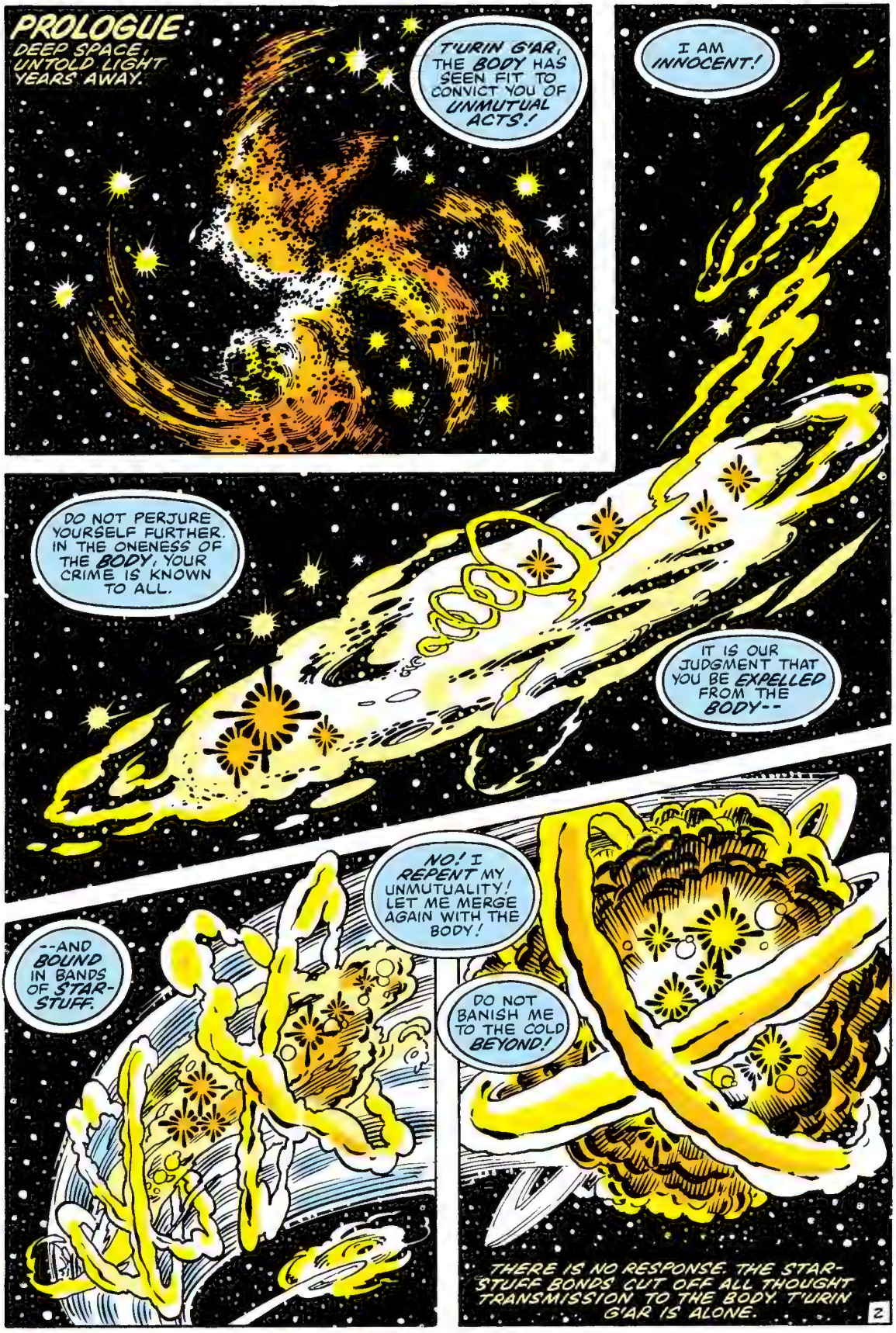
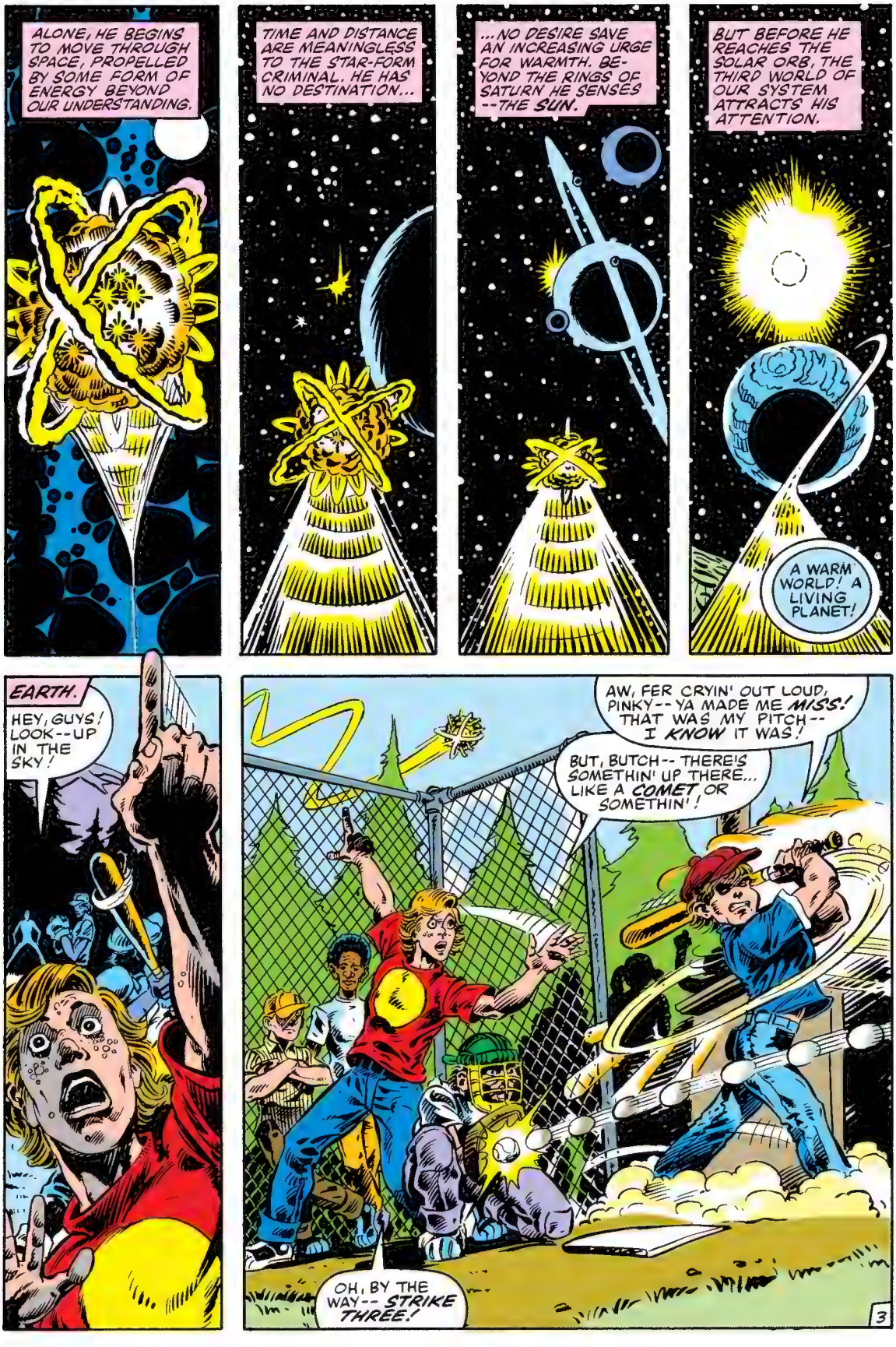
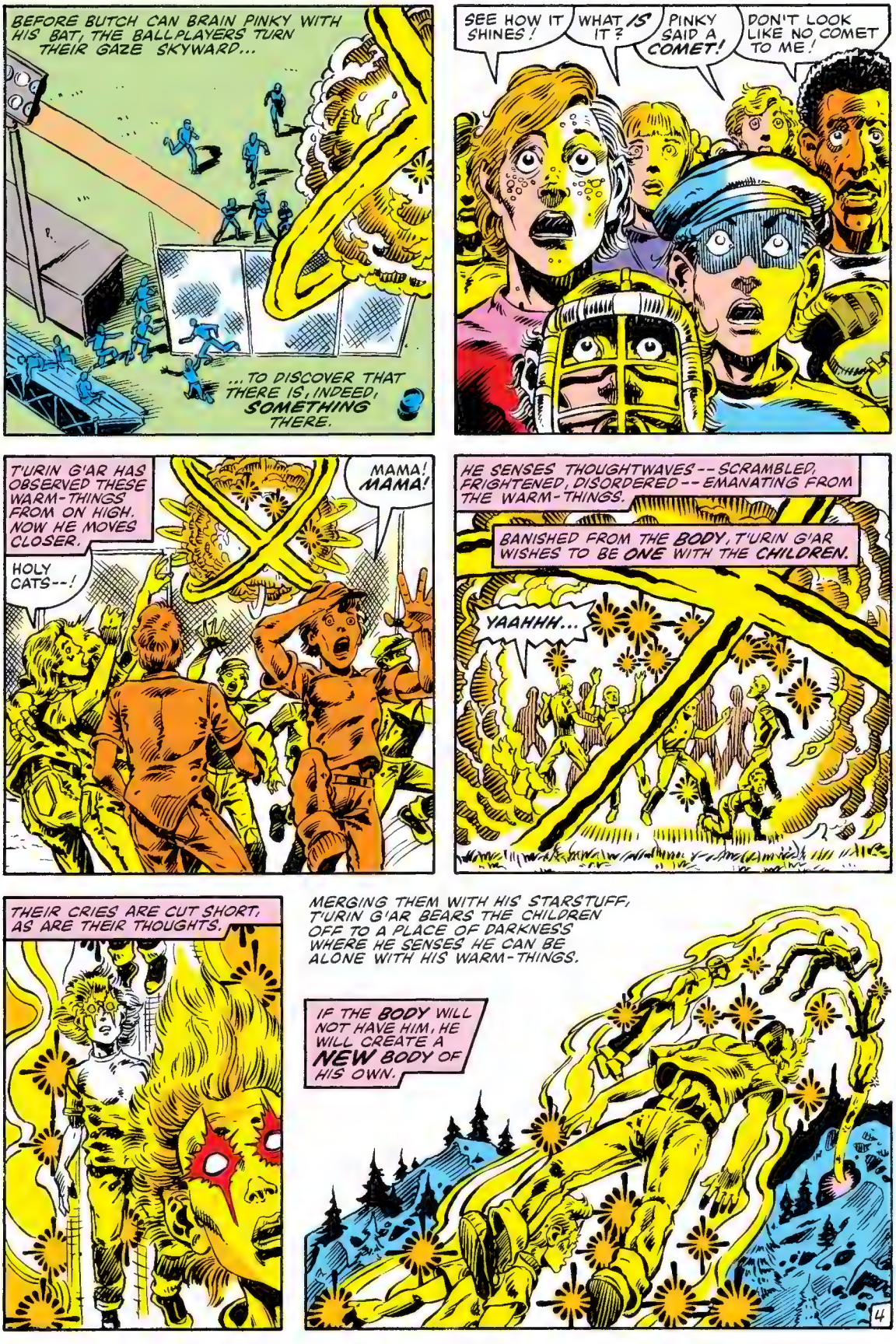
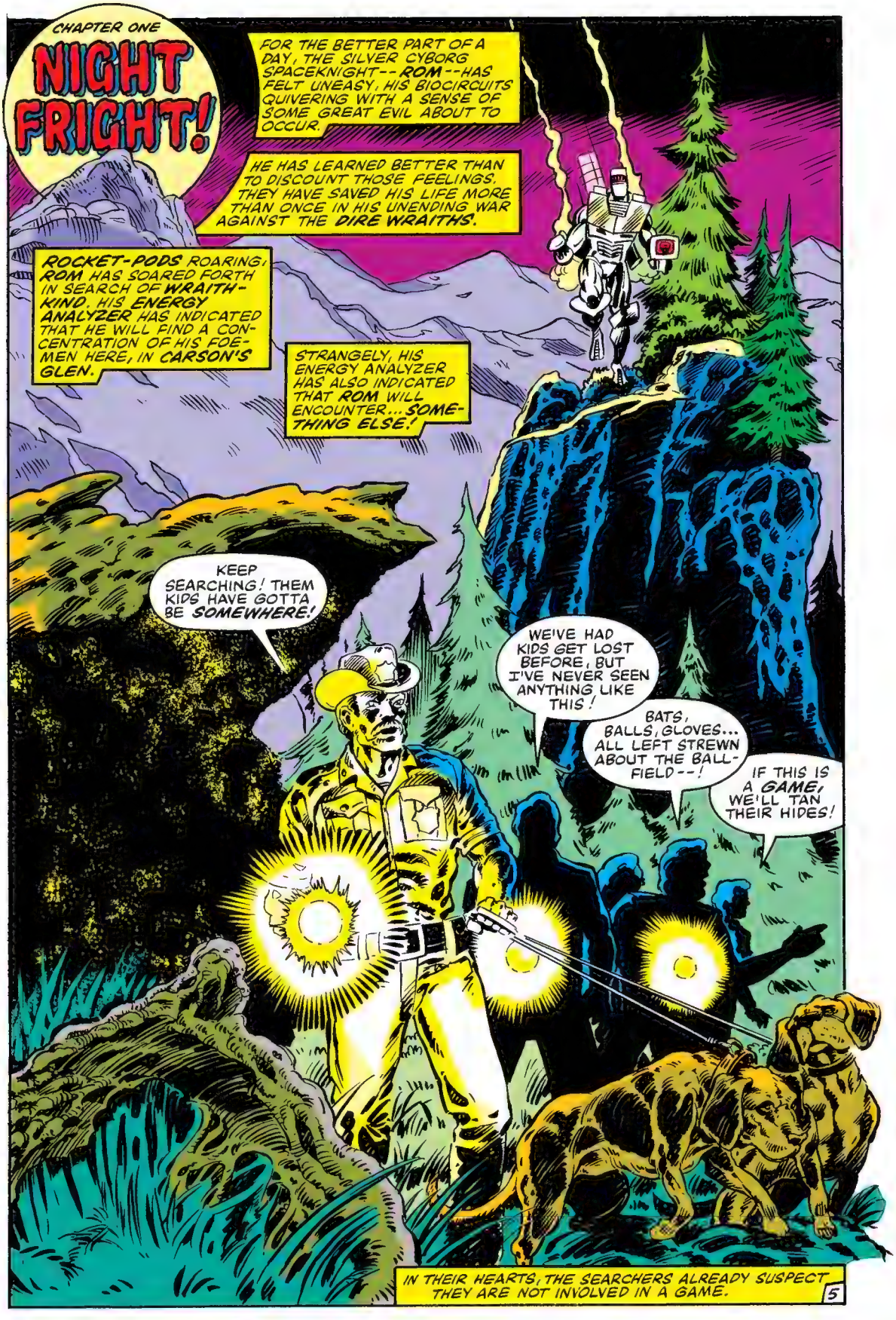
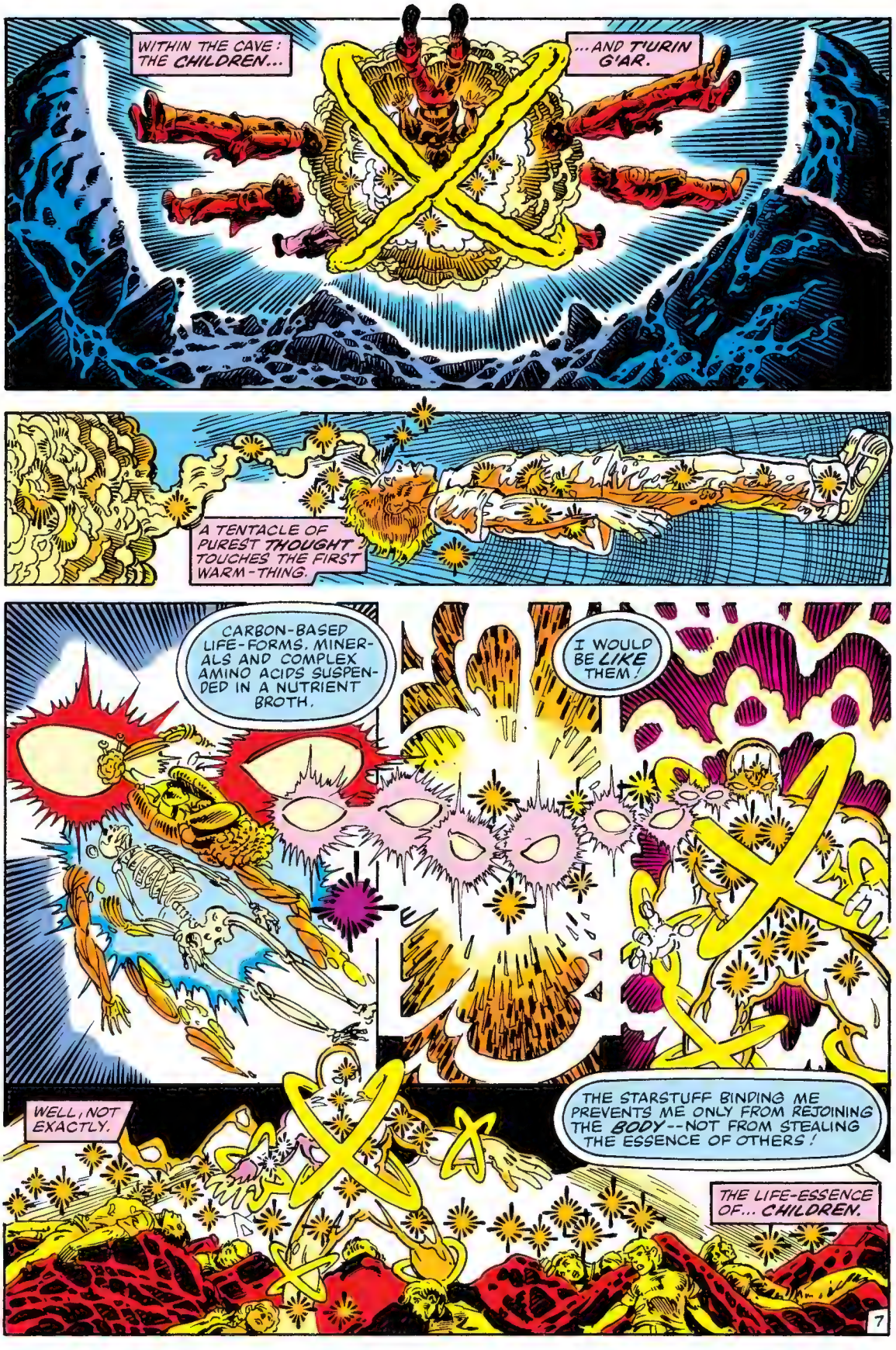

PROLOGUE:
DEEP SPACE, UNTOLD LIGHT YEARS AWAY.
T'URIN G'AR, THE BODY HAS SEEN FIT TO CONVICT YOU OF UNMUTUAL ACTS!
I AM INNOCENT!
DO NOT PERJURE YOURSELF FURTHER. IN THE ONENESS OF THE BODY, YOUR CRIME IS KNOWN TO ALL.
IT IS OUR JUDGMENT THAT YOU BE EXPELLED FROM THE BODY--
--AND BOUND IN BANDS OF STAR-STUFF.
NO! I REPENT MY UNMUTUALITY! LET ME MERGE AGAIN WITH THE BODY!
DO NOT BANISH ME TO THE COLD BEYOND!
THERE IS NO RESPONSE. THE STAR-STUFF BONDS CUT OFF ALL THOUGHT TRANSMISSION TO THE BODY. T'URIN G'AR IS ALONE.
2

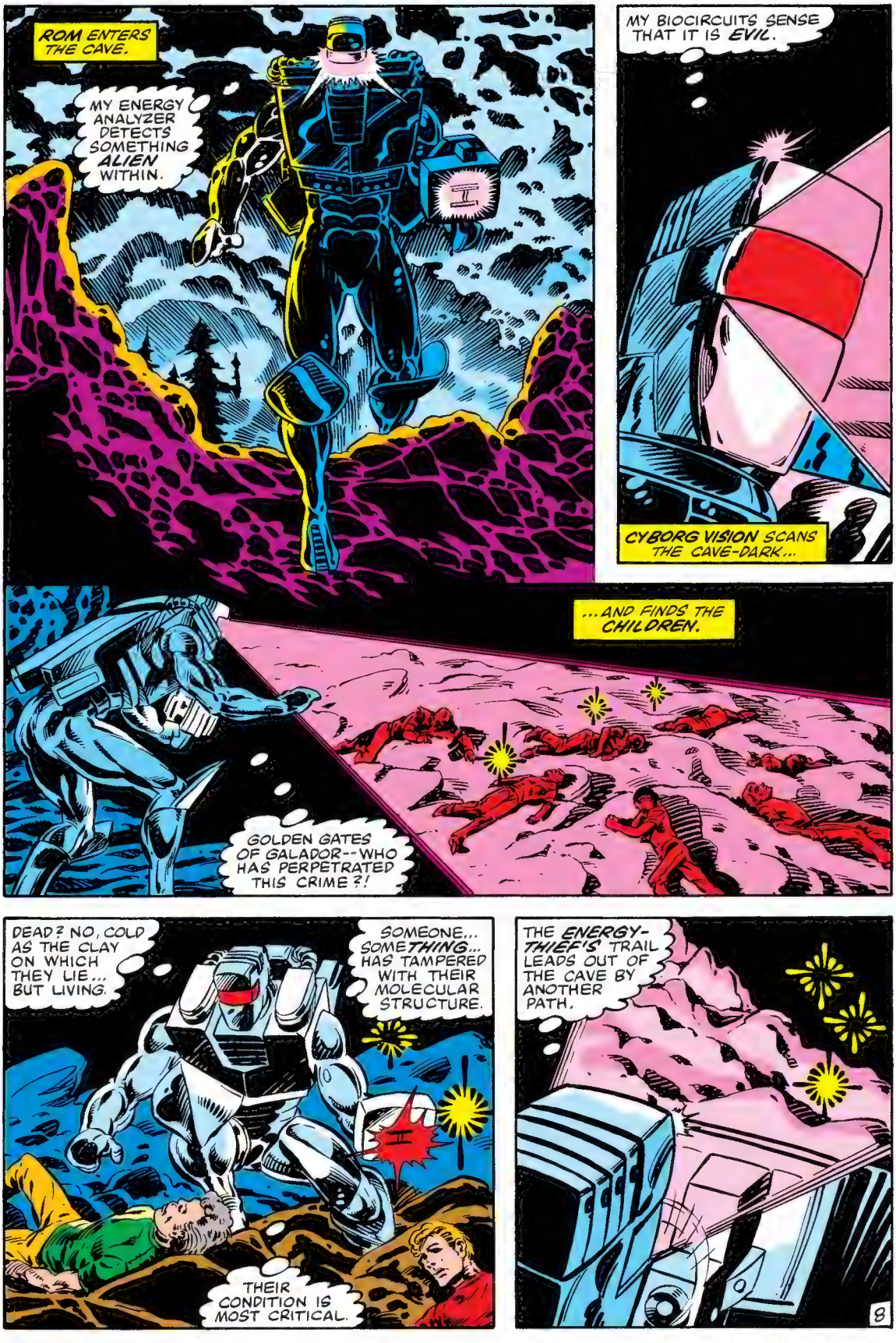

ALONE, HE BEGINS TO MOVE THROUGH SPACE, PROPELLED BY SOME FORM OF ENERGY BEYOND OUR UNDERSTANDING.
TIME AND DISTANCE ARE MEANINGLESS TO THE STAR-FORM CRIMINAL. HE HAS NO DESTINATION...
...NO DESIRE SAVE AN INCREASING URGE FOR WARMTH. BEYOND THE RINGS OF SATURN HE SENSES --THE SUN.
BUT BEFORE HE REACHES THE SOLAR ORB, THE THIRD WORLD OF OUR SYSTEM ATTRACTS HIS ATTENTION.
A WARM WORLD! A LIVING PLANET!
EARTH.
HEY, GUYS! LOOK--UP IN THE SKY!
AW, FER CRYIN' OUT LOUD, PINKY--YA MADE ME MISS! THAT WAS MY PITCH--I KNOW IT WAS!
BUT, BUTCH--THERE'S SOMETHIN' UP THERE... LIKE A COMET, OR SOMETHIN'!
OH, BY THE WAY--STRIKE THREE!
3

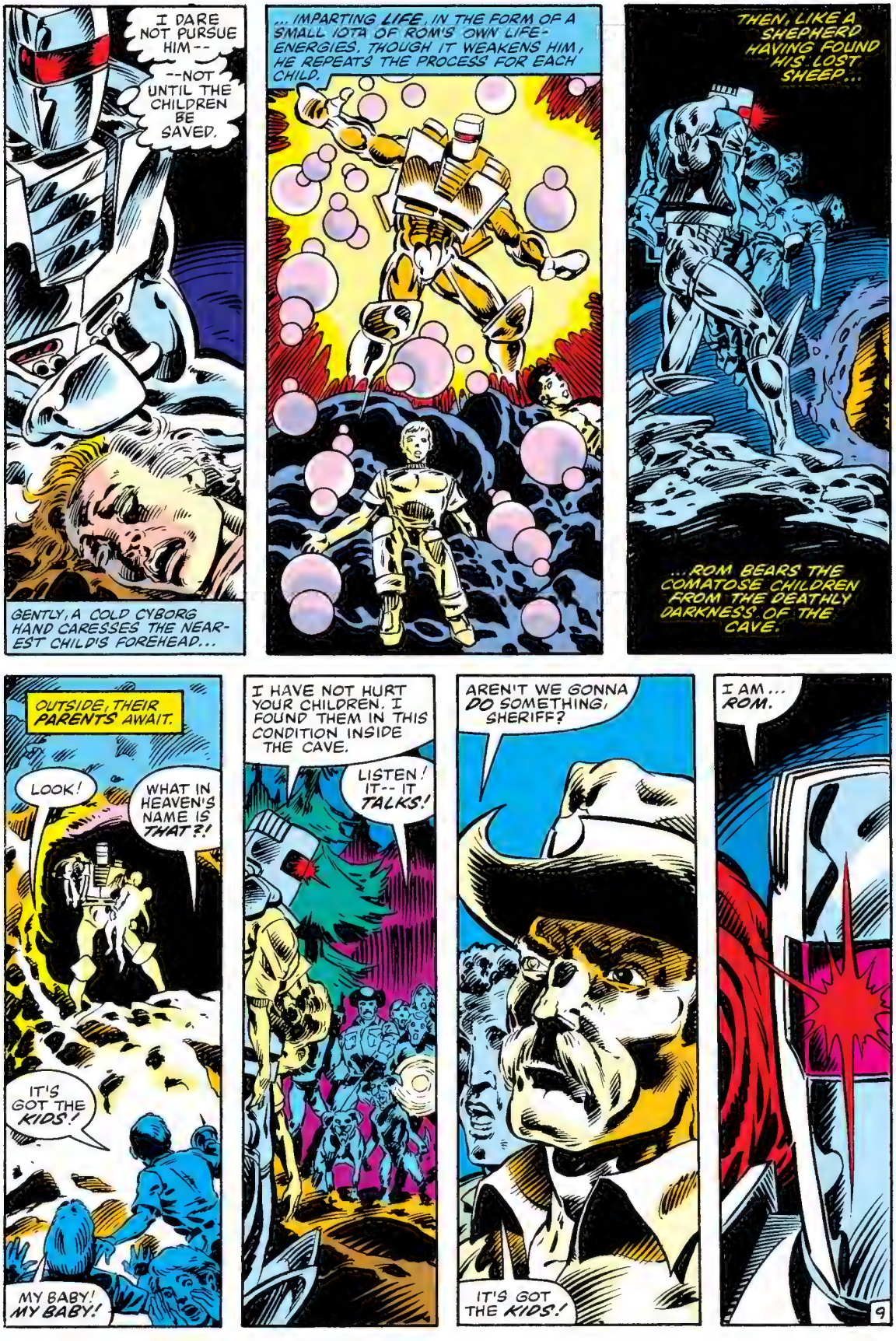

BEFORE BUTCH CAN BRAIN PINKY WITH HIS BAT, THE BALLPLAYERS TURN THEIR GAZE SKYWARD...
...TO DISCOVER THAT THERE IS, INDEED, SOMETHING THERE.
SEE HOW IT SHINES!
WHAT IS IT?
PINKY SAID A COMET!
DON'T LOOK LIKE NO COMET TO ME!
T'URIN G'AR HAS OBSERVED THESE WARM-THINGS FROM ON HIGH. NOW HE MOVES CLOSER.
HOLY CATS--!
MAMA! MAMA!
HE SENSES THOUGHTWAVES--SCRAMBLED, FRIGHTENED, DISORDERED--EMANATING FROM THE WARM-THINGS.
BANISHED FROM THE BODY, T'URIN G'AR WISHES TO BE ONE WITH THE CHILDREN.
YAAHHH...
THEIR CRIES ARE CUT SHORT, AS ARE THEIR THOUGHTS.
MERGING THEM WITH HIS STARSTUFF, T'URIN G'AR BEARS THE CHILDREN OFF TO A PLACE OF DARKNESS WHERE HE SENSES HE CAN BE ALONE WITH HIS WARM-THINGS.
IF THE BODY WILL NOT HAVE HIM, HE WILL CREATE A NEW BODY OF HIS OWN.
4


CHAPTER ONE
NIGHT FRIGHT!
FOR THE BETTER PART OF A DAY, THE SILVER CYBORG SPACEKNIGHT--ROM--HAS FELT UNEASY, HIS BIOCIRCUITS QUIVERING WITH A SENSE OF SOME GREAT EVIL ABOUT TO OCCUR.
HE HAS LEARNED BETTER THAN TO DISCOUNT THOSE FEELINGS. THEY HAVE SAVED HIS LIFE MORE THAN ONCE IN HIS UNENDING WAR AGAINST THE DIRE WRAITHS.
ROCKET-PODS ROARING, ROM HAS SOARED FORTH IN SEARCH OF WRAITH-KIND. HIS ENERGY ANALYZER HAS INDICATED THAT HE WILL FIND A CONCENTRATION OF HIS FOEMEN HERE, IN CARSON'S GLEN.
STRANGELY, HIS ENERGY ANALYZER HAS ALSO INDICATED THAT ROM WILL ENCOUNTER... SOMETHING ELSE!
KEEP SEARCHING! THEM KIDS HAVE GOTTA BE SOMEWHERE!
WE'VE HAD KIDS GET LOST BEFORE, BUT I'VE NEVER SEEN ANYTHING LIKE THIS!
BATS, BALLS, GLOVES... ALL LEFT STREWN ABOUT THE BALL-FIELD--!
IF THIS IS A GAME, WE'LL TAN THEIR HIDES!
IN THEIR HEARTS, THE SEARCHERS ALREADY SUSPECT THEY ARE NOT INVOLVED IN A GAME.
5

A COMMUNITY DESPERATELY SEARCHES THE FOOTHILLS FOR ITS MISSING CHILDREN.
HAVE I COME UPON A PLOT OF WRAITH DESIGN ?
SET ON WIDE-BEAM, ROM'S ENERGY ANALYZER SCANS THE MEN ASSEMBLED BELOW HIM.
I DETECT NO WRAITHS AMONG THE SEARCH-PARTY.
ONLY MEN-- FRIGHTENED, FEARFUL MEN.
AND SOMETHING OTHER ... SOMETHING NOT OF THIS WORLD... FURTHER UP THE SLOPES.
PING PING PING
LET THE HUMANS SEARCH IN THEIR OWN FASHION, WITH FLASHLIGHTS AND BAYING DOGS.
I WILL FOLLOW THE ENERGY-TRAIL MY ANALYZER HAS DETECTED, TO ITS SOURCE.
DARK AGAINST DEEP SHADOW, A CAVE NESTLES, HIDDEN AMIDST THE HIGH HILLS.


WITHIN THE CAVE: THE CHILDREN...
...AND T'URIN G'AR.
A TENTACLE OF PUREST THOUGHT TOUCHES THE FIRST WARM-THING.
CARBON-BASED LIFE-FORMS, MINERALS AND COMPLEX AMINO ACIDS SUSPENDED IN A NUTRIENT BROTH.
I WOULD BE LIKE THEM!
WELL, NOT EXACTLY.
THE STARSTUFF BINDING ME PREVENTS ME ONLY FROM REJOINING THE BODY--NOT FROM STEALING THE ESSENCE OF OTHERS!
THE LIFE-ESSENCE OF... CHILDREN.
7

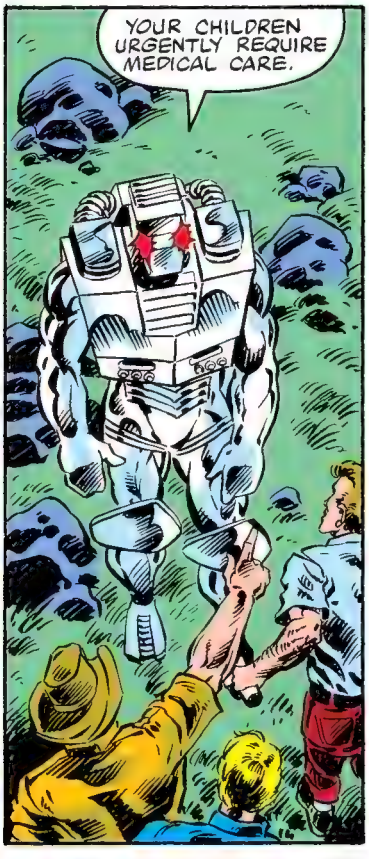

ROM ENTERS THE CAVE.
MY ENERGY ANALYZER DETECTS SOMETHING ALIEN WITHIN.
MY BIOCIRCUITS SENSE THAT IT IS EVIL.
CYBORG VISION SCANS THE CAVE-DARK...
...AND FINDS THE CHILDREN.
GOLDEN GATES OF GALADOR--WHO HAS PERPETRATED THIS CRIME?!
DEAD? NO, COLD AS THE CLAY ON WHICH THEY LIE... BUT LIVING.
SOMEONE... SOMETHING... HAS TAMPERED WITH THEIR MOLECULAR STRUCTURE.
THEIR CONDITION IS MOST CRITICAL.
THE ENERGY-THIEF'S TRAIL LEADS OUT OF THE CAVE BY ANOTHER PATH.
8


I DARE NOT PURSUE HIM--
--NOT UNTIL THE CHILDREN BE SAVED.
GENTLY, A COLD CYBORG HAND CARESSES THE NEAREST CHILD'S FOREHEAD...
...IMPARTING LIFE, IN THE FORM OF A SMALL IOTA OF ROM'S OWN LIFE-ENERGIES. THOUGH IT WEAKENS HIM, HE REPEATS THE PROCESS FOR EACH CHILD.
THEN, LIKE A SHEPHERD HAVING FOUND HIS LOST SHEEP...
...ROM BEARS THE COMATOSE CHILDREN FROM THE DEATHLY DARKNESS OF THE CAVE.
OUTSIDE, THEIR PARENTS AWAIT.
LOOK!
WHAT IN HEAVEN'S NAME IS THAT?!
IT'S GOT THE KIDS!
MY BABY! MY BABY!
I HAVE NOT HURT YOUR CHILDREN. I FOUND THEM IN THIS CONDITION INSIDE THE CAVE.
LISTEN! IT-- IT TALKS!
AREN'T WE GONNA DO SOMETHING, SHERIFF?
IT'S GOT THE KIDS!
I AM... ROM.
9

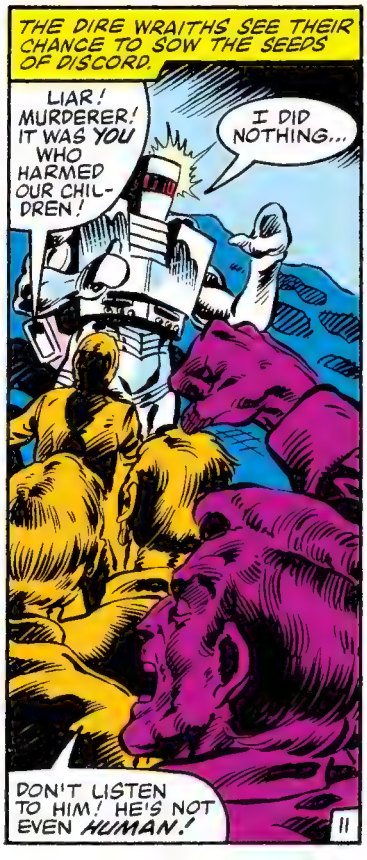
THE KIDS AIN'T MOVIN'! THAT ROBOT'S KILLED 'EM! I'M GONNA--
PUT THAT UP, YOU DANGED FOOL! IF THE KIDS AREN'T DEAD--
--PUMPING LEAD AT THAT METAL MAN WILL SURELY SEE TO IT THAT THEY SOON ARE!
HERE COME THE OTHER SEARCH PARTIES!
BUTCH! HE'S GOT BUTCH!
AND PINKY!
AND JENNY! MY JENNY!
WHAT DO WE DO, SHERIFF?
THERE'S ENOUGH OF US! WE CAN TAKE THE ROBOT!
NOT WITHOUT HARMING THE CHILDREN!
PRAY HE DOESN'T HARM THEM!
PLEASE! THAT'S MY LITTLE BOY HE'S GOT!
ROM!
LOOK! THE ROBOT'S MOVING!
HE--HE'S GIVEN ME MY SON BACK!
WH-WHO ARE YOU?
I HAVE ALREADY SAID... I AM ROM!
10

AS THE PARENTS OF CARSON'S GLEN GRATEFULLY RECEIVE THEIR CHILDREN, THERE ARE THOSE IN THE GATHERING CROWD WHO RECOGNIZE ROM AT ONCE!
THE SPACEKNIGHT--HERE! HE MUST HAVE DETECTED OUR PRESENCE!
IMPOSSIBLE! THE JAMMING DEVICES ON OUR BELTS SHOULD SHIELD US FROM HIS ACCURSED ENERGY ANALYZER!
WHATEVER HARMED THE HUMAN CHILDREN DREW HIM HITHER! IT WAS NOT OUR DOING!
BUT THE SPACEKNIGHT WILL BLAME US FOR IT--

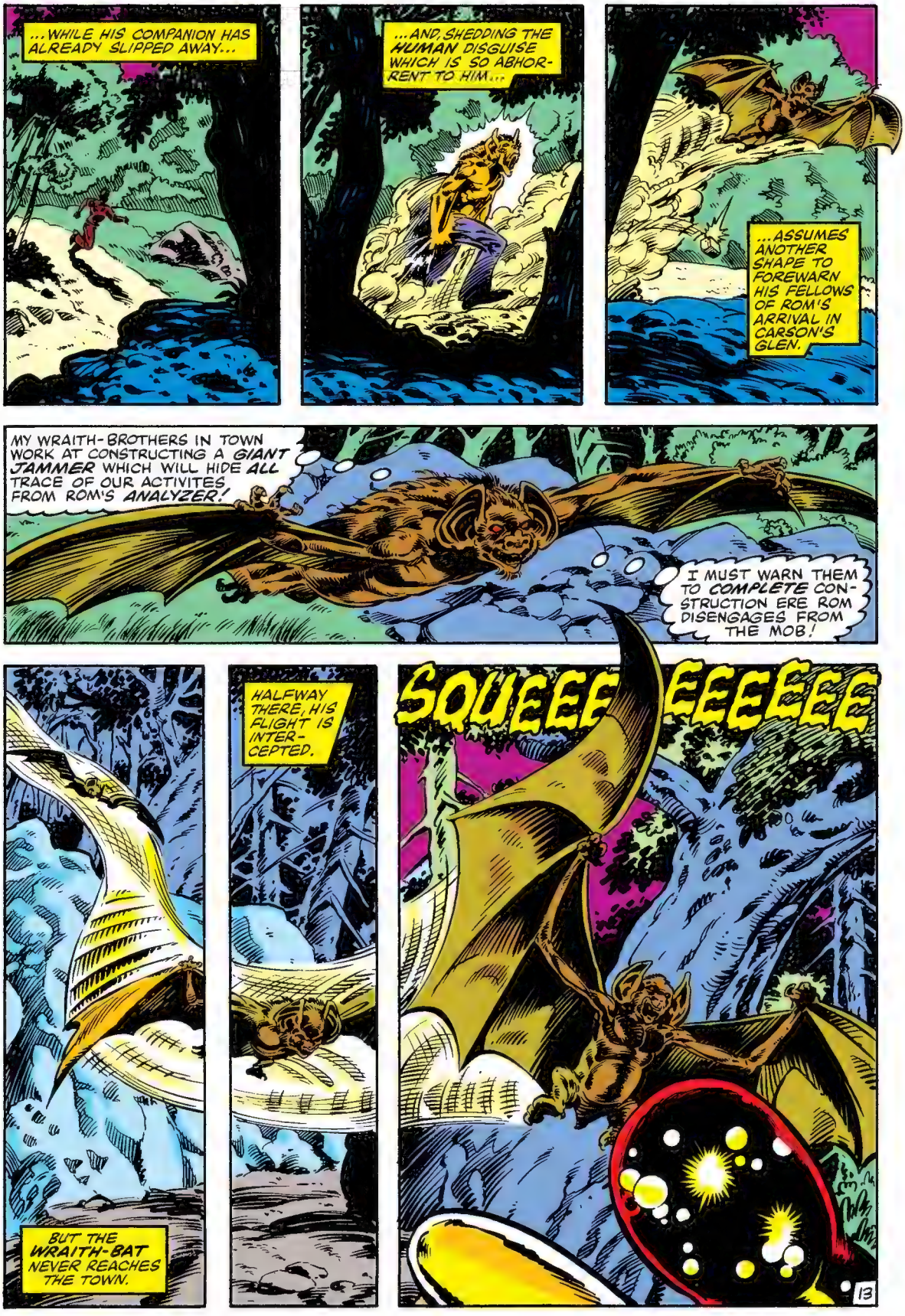
--AND THE INSIPID EARTHLINGS MAY WELL BELIEVE THE NOBLE GALADORIAN... UNLESS WE SHIFT THE BLAME TO ROM!
THESE TWO ARE HUMAN-DISGUISED DIRE WRAITHS. EONS AGO, ROM AND HIS FELLOW SPACEKNIGHTS DEFEATED THE WRAITH INVASION OF GALADOR...
...AND DROVE THE EVIL ONES FROM THEIR OWN DARK NEBULA OUT INTO THE VASTNESS OF SPACE. SWEARING REVENGE, THE WRAITHS BEGAN TO REBUILD THEIR STRENGTH ON OTHER WORLDS... WORLDS SUCH AS EARTH.


YOUR CHILDREN URGENTLY REQUIRE MEDICAL CARE.

PINKY FEELS SO LIGHT--SO LIFELESS! WHAT HAVE YOU DONE TO HIM?!
THAT IS HOW I FOUND THE CHILD...

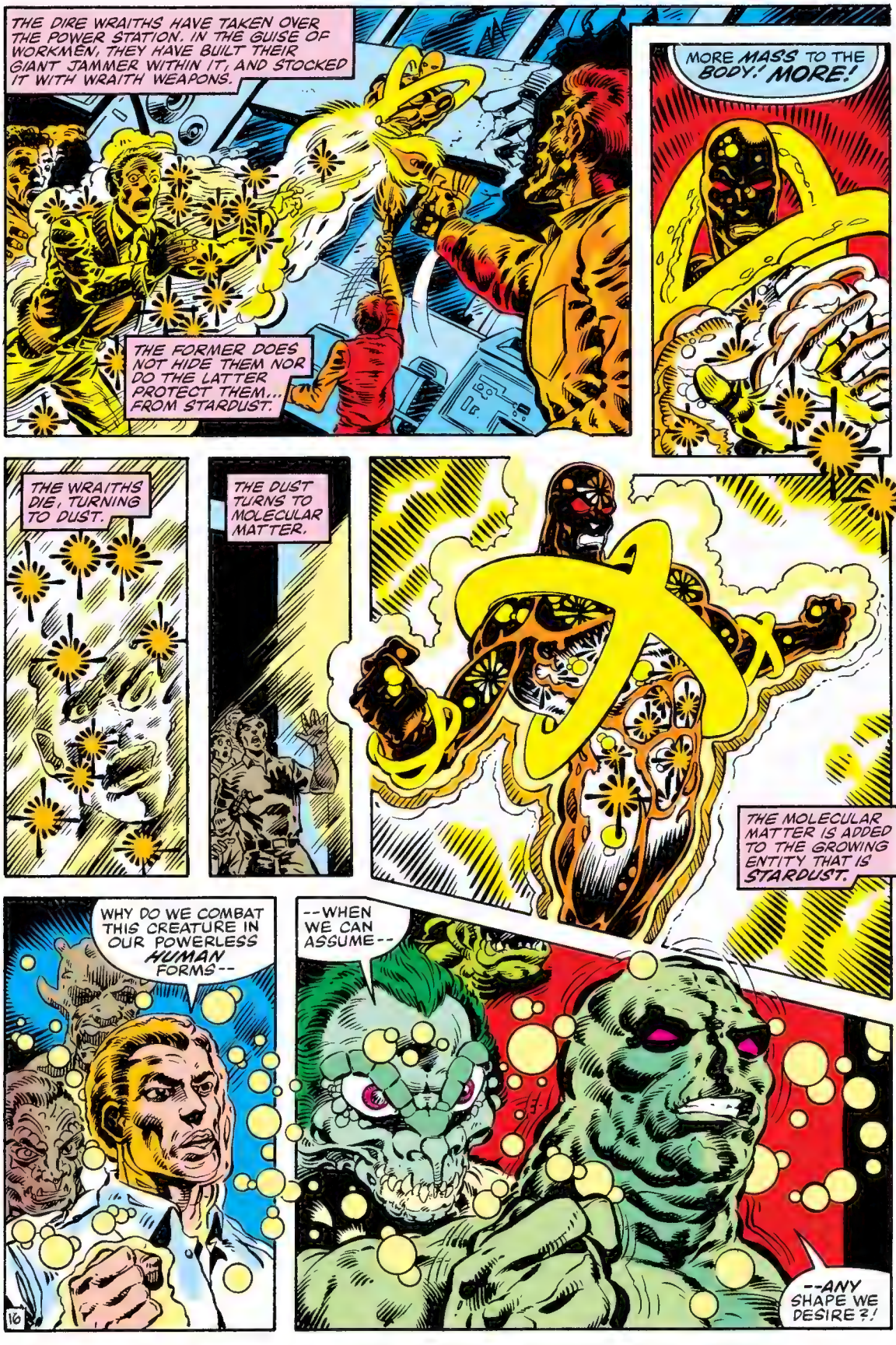

THE DIRE WRAITHS SEE THEIR CHANCE TO SOW THE SEEDS OF DISCORD.
LIAR! MURDERER! IT WAS YOU WHO HARMED OUR CHILDREN!
I DID NOTHING...
DON'T LISTEN TO HIM! HE'S NOT EVEN HUMAN!

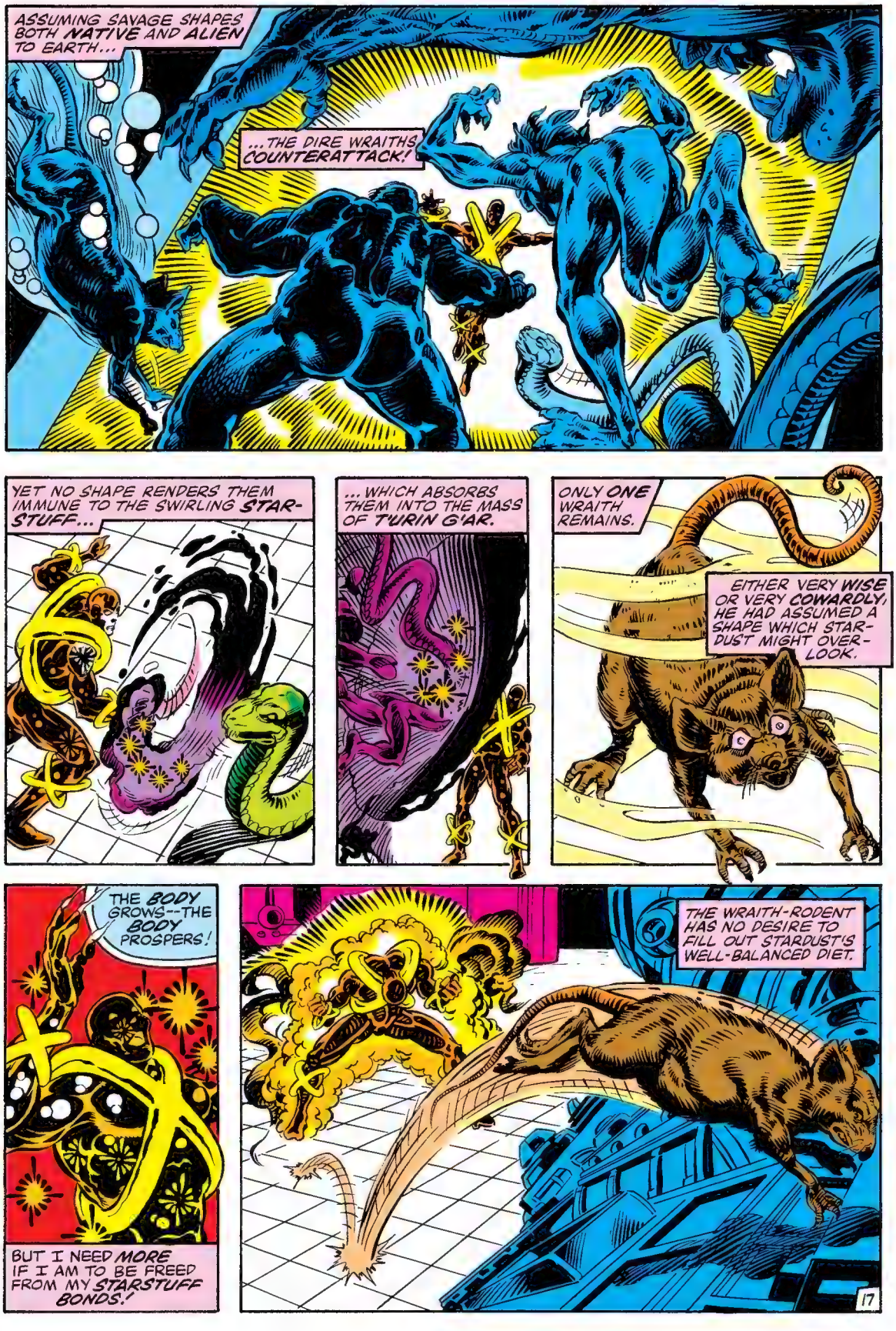
I WAS AS HUMAN AS YOU--ONCE. THEN THE DIRE WRAITHS CAME TO MY WORLD, GALADOR. IN DEFENSE OF OUR PLANET, THE FLOWER OF OUR YOUTH SACRIFICED THEIR HUMANITY TO BECOME SPACEKNIGHTS!
THE WAR WAS WON, THE WRAITHS DEFEATED! YET, WE COULD NOT RECLAIM OUR HUMANITY SO LONG AS THEY POSED A PERIL TO OTHER WORLDS.
THEY ARE HERE--ON EARTH--IN YOUR COMMUNITY. I HAVE DETECTED THEM.
IT MAY WELL BE THEY WHO HAVE HARMED YOUR CHILDREN.
YOU CAN'T FOOL US! YOU'RE THE ONLY ALIEN HERE! YOU HURT THE CHILDREN!
A STONE AGAINST SPACEKNIGHT ARMOR...
SPLANG
...CAN SERVE NO PURPOSE, SAVE TO FUNCTION AS A CATALYST WHEREBY REASON IS ERASED AND CHAOS TAKES OVER.
PERFECT! THE HUMANS ATTACK ROM!
BLAM
ONE OF THEM IS BOUND TO BE HURT--IF NOT BY HIM, THEN IN THE CRUSH CAUSED BY THEIR OWN PANIC --AND THEN THEY WILL NEVER BELIEVE THE SPACEKNIGHT.
I HAVE NO WISH TO HARM YOU!
LOOK! SOMETHING'S APPEARING IN HIS HAND!
A WEAPON?
MY ENERGY ANALYZER IS NO WEAPON. IT IS MERELY A MEANS OF REVEALING... THE TRUTH.
IF THERE BE DIRE WRAITHS AMONG YOU, INCITING YOU HUMANS TO RIOT, I WILL SOON FIND THEM OUT.
BUT THE WRAITH REMAINING IN THE CROWD IS--AS HE HAD PREDICTED --ABLE TO DEFY DETECTION...
12

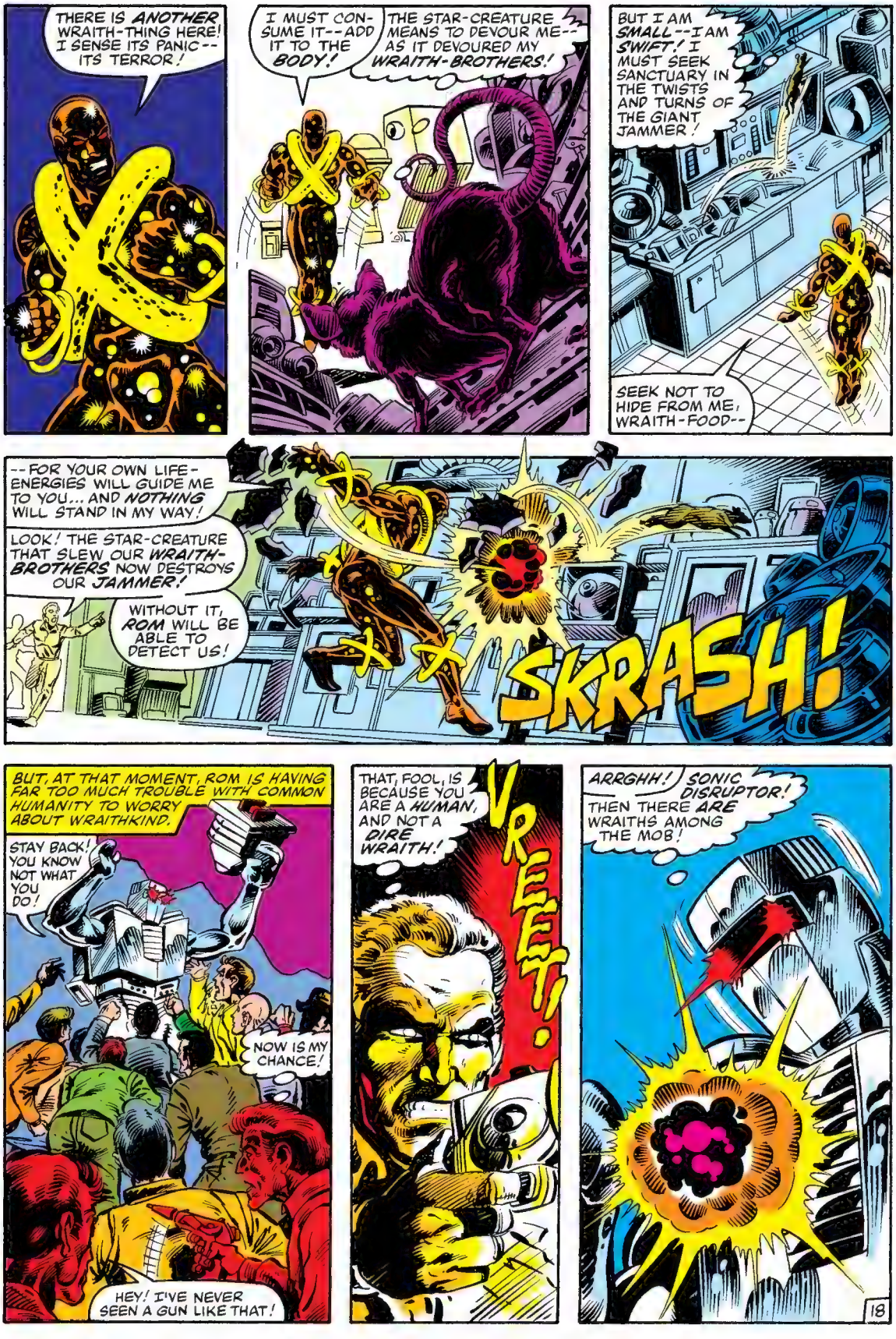

...WHILE HIS COMPANION HAS ALREADY SLIPPED AWAY...
...AND, SHEDDING THE HUMAN DISGUISE WHICH IS SO ABHORRENT TO HIM...
...ASSUMES ANOTHER SHAPE TO FOREWARN HIS FELLOWS OF ROM'S ARRIVAL IN CARSON'S GLEN.
MY WRAITH-BROTHERS IN TOWN WORK AT CONSTRUCTING A GIANT JAMMER WHICH WILL HIDE ALL TRACE OF OUR ACTIVITES FROM ROM'S ANALYZER!
I MUST WARN THEM TO COMPLETE CONSTRUCTION ERE ROM DISENGAGES FROM THE MOB!
BUT THE WRAITH-BAT NEVER REACHES THE TOWN.
HALFWAY THERE, HIS FLIGHT IS INTERCEPTED.
SQUEEE EEEEEEE
13

I AM STARDUST! I WANT YOUR LIFE!
CHAPTER TWO
THE SCOURGE FROM SPACE!
14

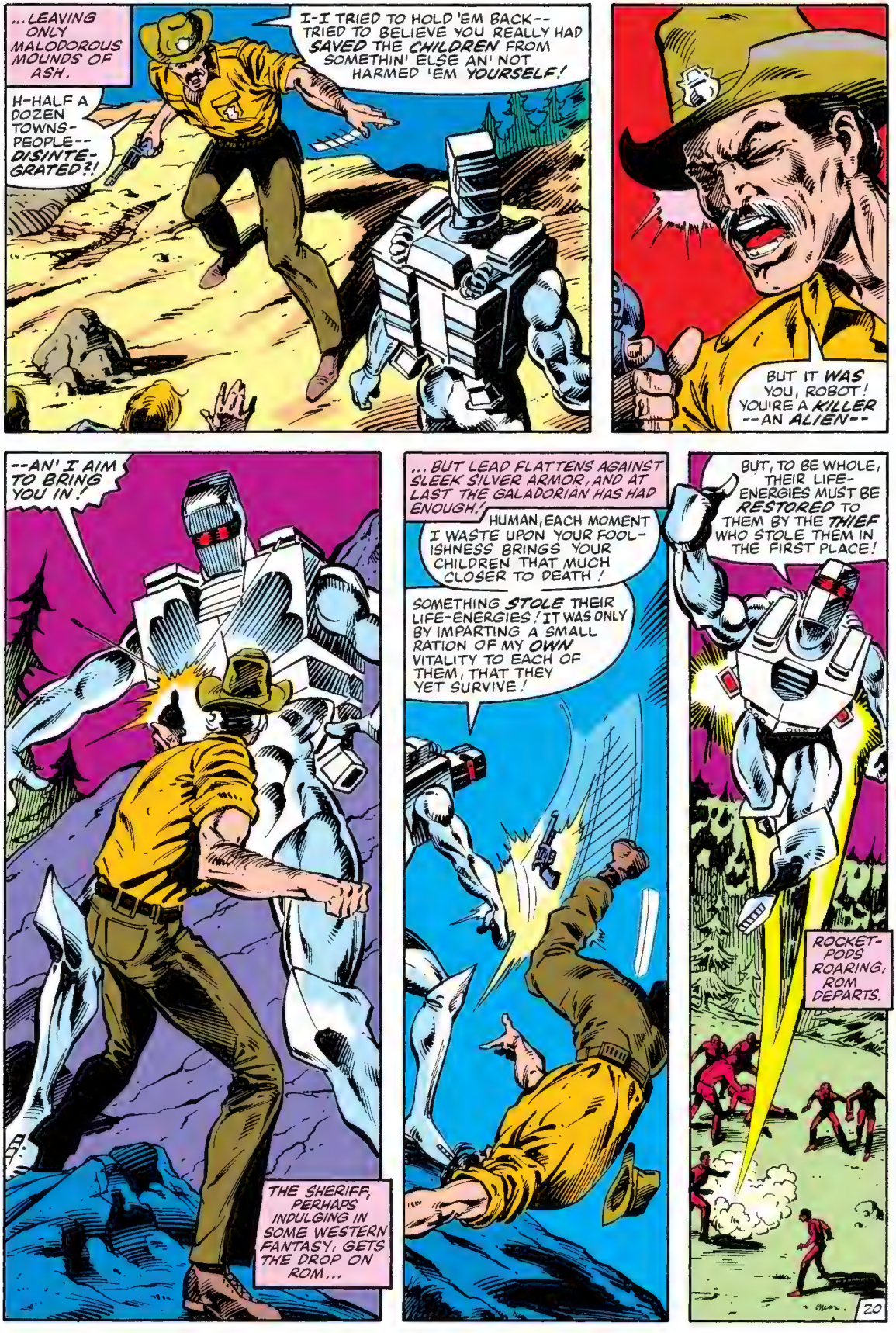
AS HE DID WITH THE CHILDREN, T'URIN G'AR CONSUMES THE WRAITH'S LIFE-ENERGIES.
HOWEVER, THE CHILDREN HAD ONLY YIELDED SOME OF THEIR MOLECULAR MATTER. THE WRAITH YIELDS ALL.
INTERESTING. THIS WORLD SHELTERS TWO DISTINCT INTELLIGENT LIFE-FORMS... ONE FAR MORE SATISFYING THAN THE OTHER.
I WOULD HAVE MORE OF THE SECOND, TO MAKE THE BODY GROW.
SENDING OUT TENDRILS OF STARSTUFF TO SCAN THE VICINITY, STARDUST DISCOVERS A CONCENTRATION OF THOSE HE SEEKS...
...AT THE POWER STATION IN CARSON'S GLEN.
IN THEIR THOUGHTS, THE YOUNG ONES WHOSE ENERGY I ABSORBED CALLED THEMSELVES... HUMAN.
THE LAST CREATURE I ABSORBED WAS DIFFERENT. HIS RACE-NAME WAS... DIRE WRAITH.
THERE ARE MORE OF HIS KIND...
...HERE.
BY THE DARK NEBULA--!
FROM BEYOND YOUR DARK NEBULA, WRAITH-THING--FROM BEYOND THE STARS!
STARDUST COMES!
15


THE DIRE WRAITHS HAVE TAKEN OVER THE POWER STATION. IN THE GUISE OF WORKMEN, THEY HAVE BUILT THEIR GIANT JAMMER WITHIN IT, AND STOCKED IT WITH WRAITH WEAPONS.
THE FORMER DOES NOT HIDE THEM NOR DO THE LATTER PROTECT THEM... FROM STARDUST.
MORE MASS TO THE BODY! MORE!
THE WRAITHS DIE, TURNING TO DUST.
THE DUST TURNS TO MOLECULAR MATTER.
THE MOLECULAR MATTER IS ADDED TO THE GROWING ENTITY THAT IS STARDUST.
WHY DO WE COMBAT THIS CREATURE IN OUR POWERLESS HUMAN FORMS--
--WHEN WE CAN ASSUME--
--ANY SHAPE WE DESIRE?!
16


ASSUMING SAVAGE SHAPES BOTH NATIVE AND ALIEN TO EARTH...
...THE DIRE WRAITHS COUNTERATTACK!
YET NO SHAPE RENDERS THEM IMMUNE TO THE SWIRLING STAR-STUFF...
...WHICH ABSORBS THEM INTO THE MASS OF T'URIN G'AR.
ONLY ONE WRAITH REMAINS.
EITHER VERY WISE OR VERY COWARDLY, HE HAD ASSUMED A SHAPE WHICH STAR-DUST MIGHT OVER-LOOK.
THE BODY GROWS--THE BODY PROSPERS!
BUT I NEED MORE IF I AM TO BE FREED FROM MY STARSTUFF BONDS!
THE WRAITH-RODENT HAS NO DESIRE TO FILL OUT STARDUST'S WELL-BALANCED DIET.
17


THERE IS ANOTHER WRAITH-THING HERE! I SENSE ITS PANIC--ITS TERROR!
I MUST CONSUME IT--ADD IT TO THE BODY!
THE STAR-CREATURE MEANS TO DEVOUR ME--AS IT DEVOURED MY WRAITH-BROTHERS!
BUT I AM SMALL--I AM SWIFT! I MUST SEEK SANCTUARY IN THE TWISTS AND TURNS OF THE GIANT JAMMER!
SEEK NOT TO HIDE FROM ME, WRAITH-FOOD--
--FOR YOUR OWN LIFE-ENERGIES WILL GUIDE ME TO YOU... AND NOTHING WILL STAND IN MY WAY!
LOOK! THE STAR-CREATURE THAT SLEW OUR WRAITH-BROTHERS NOW DESTROYS OUR JAMMER!
WITHOUT IT, ROM WILL BE ABLE TO DETECT US!
SKRASH!
BUT, AT THAT MOMENT, ROM IS HAVING FAR TOO MUCH TROUBLE WITH COMMON HUMANITY TO WORRY ABOUT WRAITHKIND.
STAY BACK! YOU KNOW NOT WHAT YOU DO!
NOW IS MY CHANCE!
HEY! I'VE NEVER SEEN A GUN LIKE THAT!
THAT, FOOL, IS BECAUSE YOU ARE A HUMAN, AND NOT A DIRE WRAITH!
VREET!
ARRGHH! SONIC DISRUPTOR! THEN THERE ARE WRAITHS AMONG THE MOB!
18

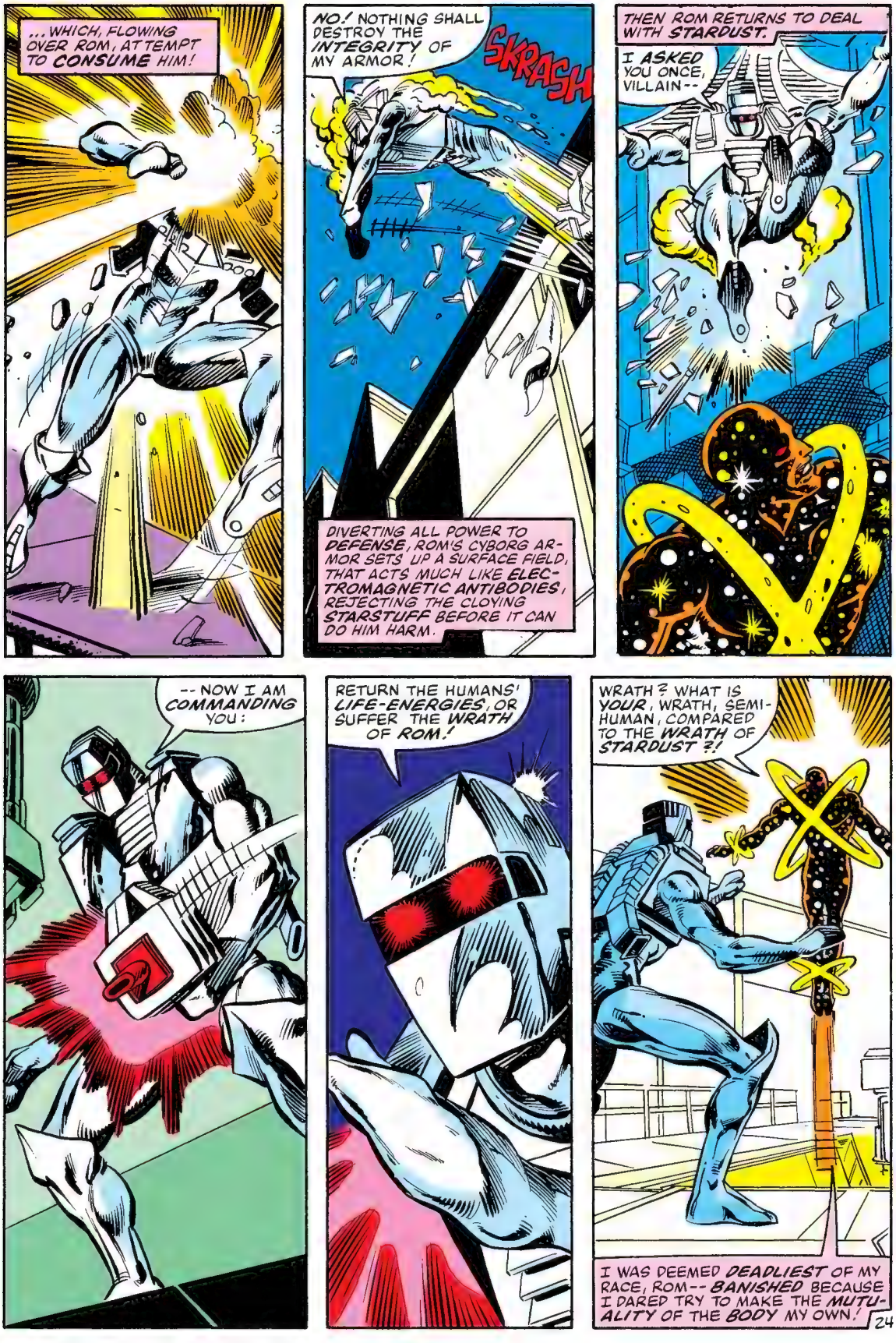
HUMANS, THE ENEMY IS AMONG YOU!
BY ATTACKING ME, HE HAS GIVEN HIMSELF AWAY!
NOW LET MY ENERGY ANALYZER REVEAL ALL!
THE ANALYZER GLOWS CRIMSON...
...AND THIS TIME, THE DIRE WRAITHS ARE REVEALED.
SOMETHING MUST HAVE HAPPENED TO OUR JAMMERS!
ROM SEES US FOR WHAT WE ARE!
BUT THE HUMANS DO NOT! LET US SACRIFICE THEM TO SHIELD OUR ESCAPE!
WILL YOU NEVER LEARN WRAITHS?
ONCE DETECTED, THERE IS NO ESCAPE FOR THE LIKES OF YOU!
LIMBO AWAITS!
EEEYARRGHH!
A DIMENSIONAL PORTAL OPENS.
IT SUCKS THE WRAITHS THROUGH IT...
19

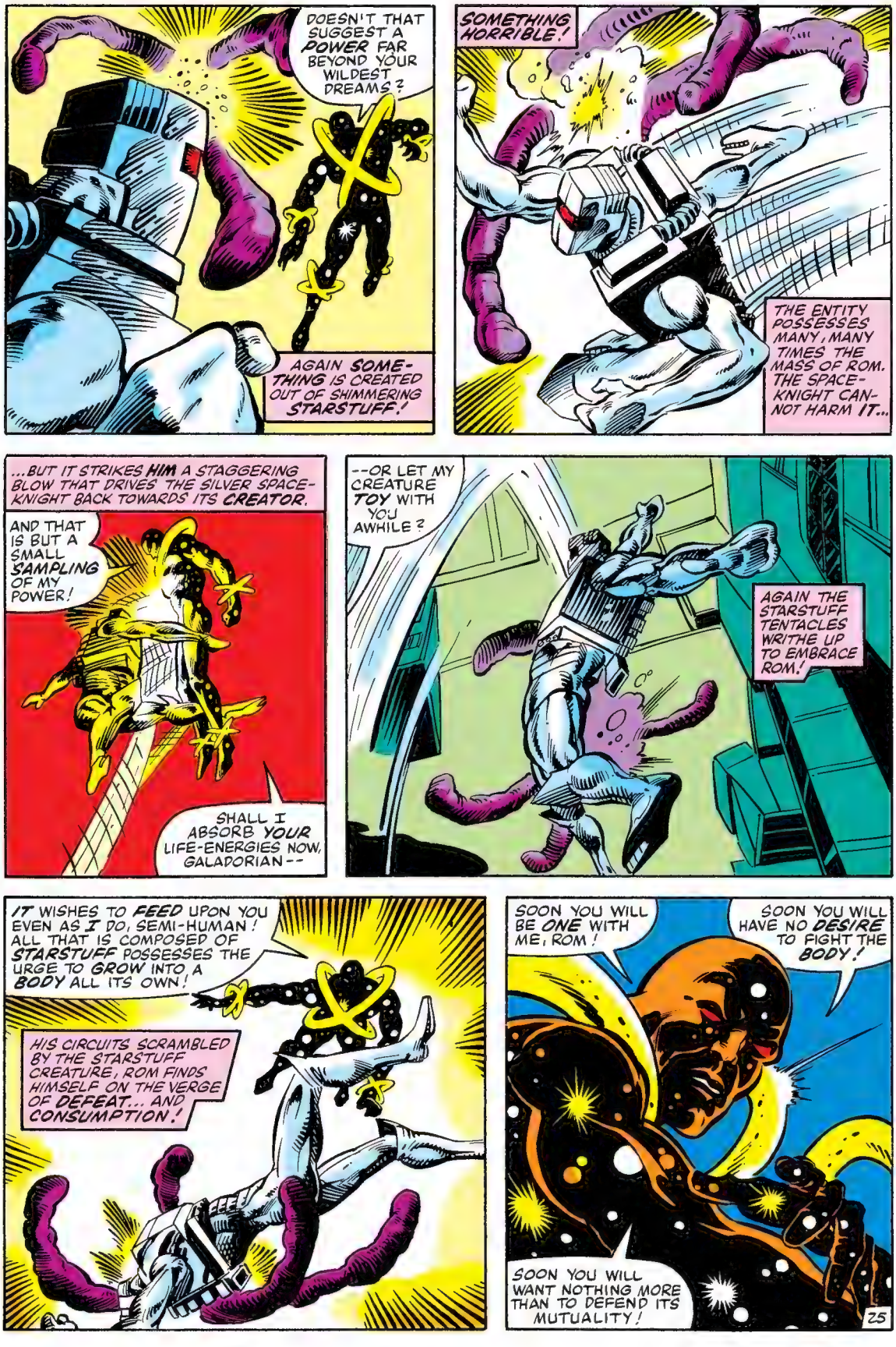

...LEAVING ONLY MALODOROUS MOUNDS OF ASH.
H-HALF A DOZEN TOWNS-PEOPLE--DISINTE-GRATED?!
I-I TRIED TO HOLD 'EM BACK--TRIED TO BELIEVE YOU REALLY HAD SAVED THE CHILDREN FROM SOMETHIN' ELSE AN' NOT HARMED 'EM YOURSELF!
BUT IT WAS YOU, ROBOT! YOU'RE A KILLER --AN ALIEN--
--AN' I AIM TO BRING YOU IN!
THE SHERIFF, PERHAPS INDULGING IN SOME WESTERN FANTASY, GETS THE DROP ON ROM...
...BUT LEAD FLATTENS AGAINST SLEEK SILVER ARMOR, AND AT LAST THE GALADORIAN HAS HAD ENOUGH!
HUMAN, EACH MOMENT I WASTE UPON YOUR FOOL-ISHNESS BRINGS YOUR CHILDREN THAT MUCH CLOSER TO DEATH!
SOMETHING STOLE THEIR LIFE-ENERGIES! IT WAS ONLY BY IMPARTING A SMALL RATION OF MY OWN VITALITY TO EACH OF THEM, THAT THEY YET SURVIVE!
BUT, TO BE WHOLE, THEIR LIFE-ENERGIES MUST BE RESTORED TO THEM BY THE THIEF WHO STOLE THEM IN THE FIRST PLACE!
ROCKET-PODS ROARING, ROM DEPARTS.
20

THAT ROBOT'S HEADING RIGHT FOR TOWN!
SHERIFF, WHAT ARE WE GONNA DO?
THE ROBOT FRIED SIX CITIZENS-- BUT LEFT ME ALIVE! WHY?
HE SAID SOMETHING ABOUT THEM NOT BEING HUMAN!
NO! I MUST BE MAD TO BELIEVE HIM! AND YET--!
TO YOUR CARS, MEN! WE'VE GOT TO GET BACK TO TOWN!
MEANWHILE, STREAKING OVER THE COUNTRYSIDE...
SOMEHOW THE WRAITHS JAMMED THE DETECTING ABILITIES OF MY ENERGY ANALYZER--AND, JUST AS INEXPLICABLY, THAT JAMMING WAS REMOVED!
IN THAT INSTANT, I MONITORED A WRAITH INFESTATION OF YONDER TOWN--
--AND THE PRESENCE OF THAT OTHER FOR WHOM I SEEK!
CARSON'S GLEN: GUIDED BY HIS ENERGY ANALYZER, ROM SETS DOWN JUST OUTSIDE THE TOWN'S POWER PLANT IN TIME TO ENCOUNTER...
A DIRE WRAITH!
ROM!
PARKING
MY ANALYZER REVEALED YOU FOR WHAT YOU TRULY ARE, ODIOUS...
PLEASE, THERE'S NO TIME FOR THAT NOW!
IT IS IN THERE-- IT IS EATING US!
DON'T LET IT GET ME, SPACEKNIGHT, I IMPLORE YOU! SHOW MERCY!
BETTER LIMBO THAN THAT KIND OF DEATH!
AS YOU WISH, VILE CREATURE.
AGAIN THE HIGH WHINE OF ROM'S NEUTRALIZER FILLS THE AIR...
21

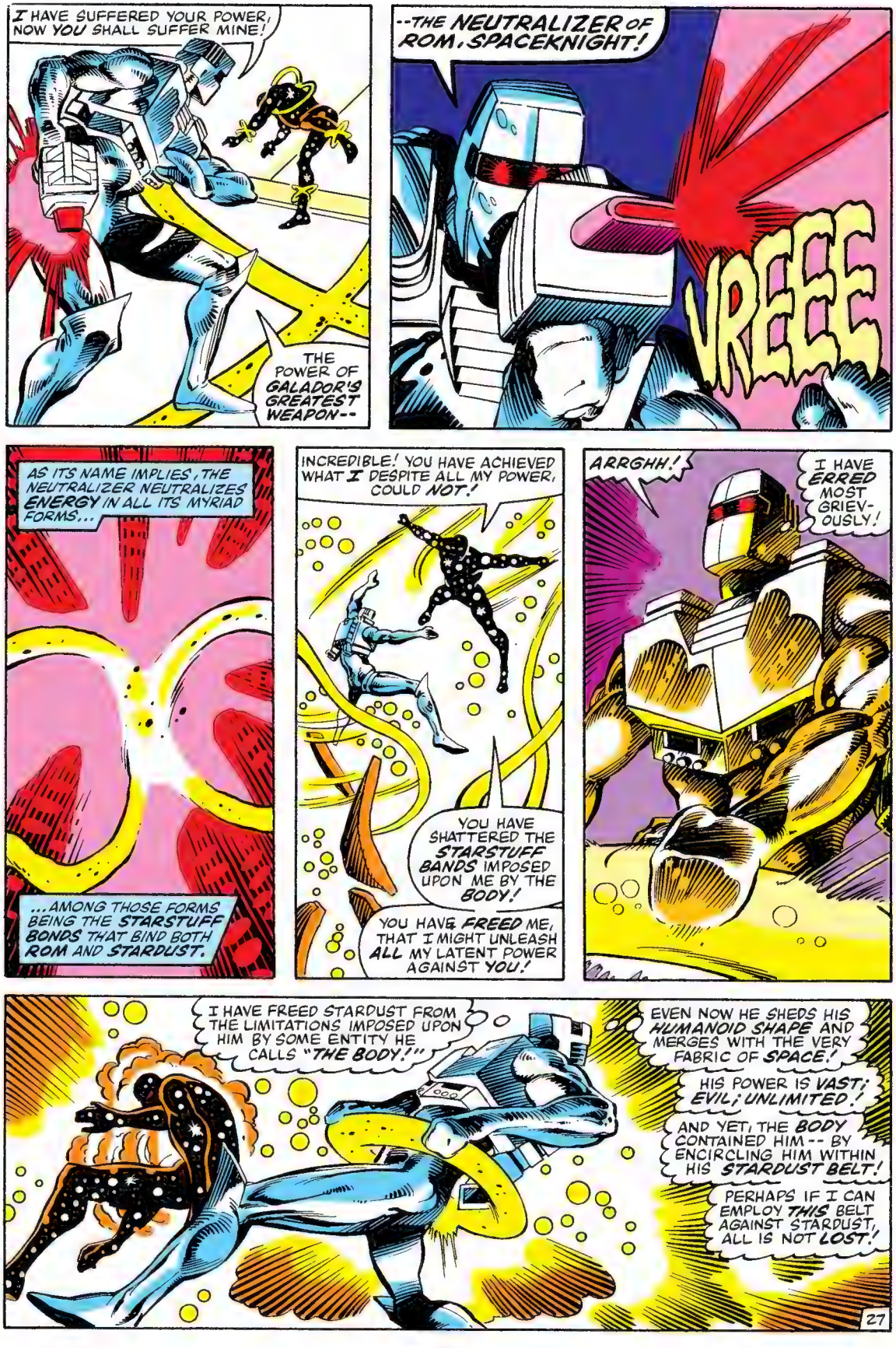
...AND THE DIRE WRAITH RECEIVES THAT MERCY FOR WHICH HE BEGGED.
NOW I SHALL SEE WITH MY OWN CYBORG VISION THAT WHICH THE WRAITH FEARED SO GREATLY!
ALREADY DO I BEGIN TO SUSPECT 'TWILL BE THE SAME FORCE WHICH HARMED THE CHILDREN!
CHAPTER THREE:
TO SLAY A SOUL-THIEF!
INSIDE THE POWER STATION, THE LAST OF THE DIRE WRAITHS SUCCUMBS TO THE ENERGY-SAPPING EVIL OF STARDUST!
MORE! TO GROW IN POWER, THE BODY MUST HAVE EVER MORE!
BE ONE WITH ME, WRAITH-THING! LET YOUR LIFE FLOW FORTH INTO MINE!
22

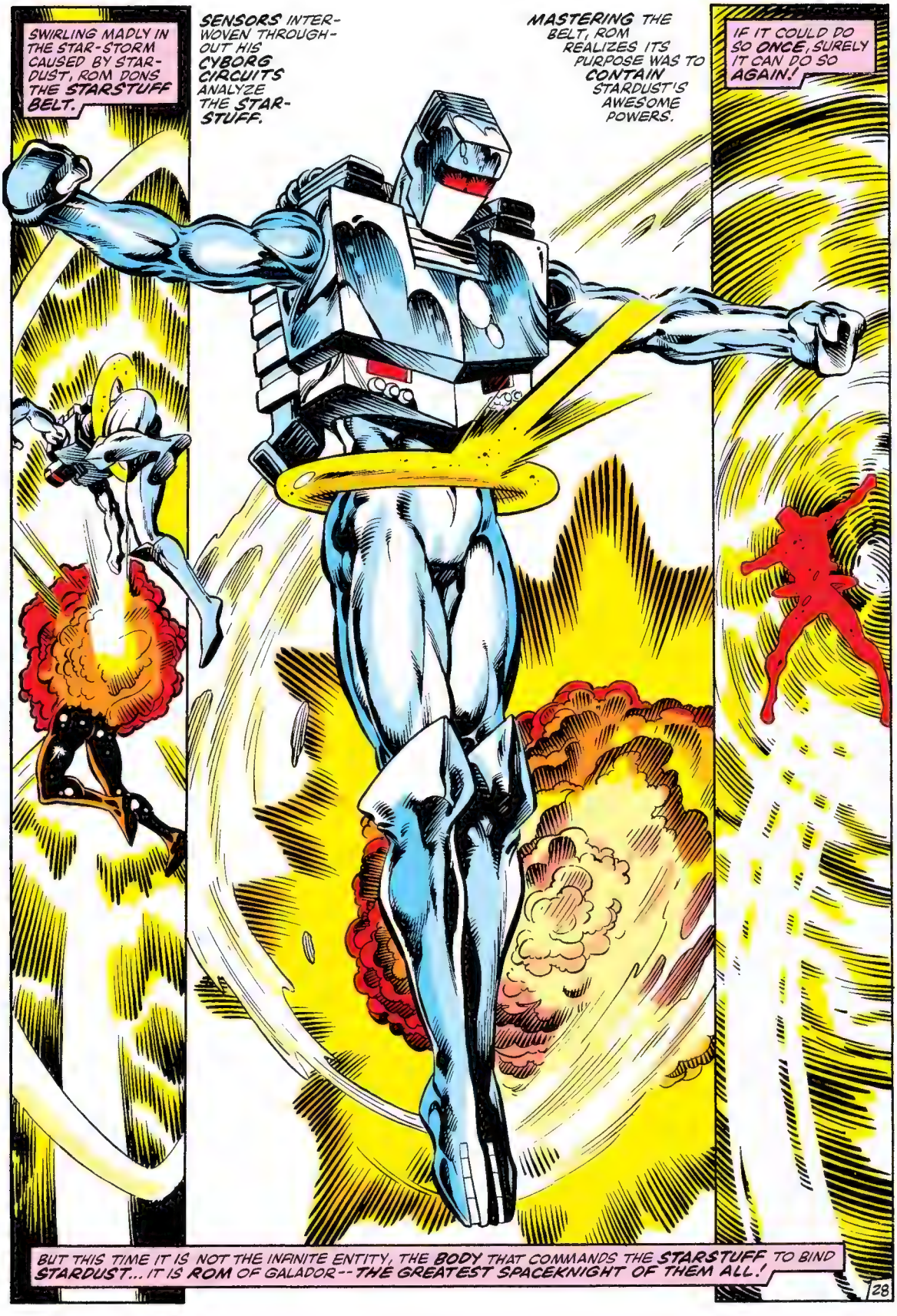
THE WRAITH DOESN'T HAVE MUCH CHOICE...
...LIKE HIS FELLOWS BEFORE HIM, HE TURNS TO ASH...
...AND DIES, ABSORBED INTO THE BEING CALLED STARDUST.
VERY IMPRESSIVE, CREATURE FROM THE STARS.
EH? A BEING UNLIKE ANY OTHER I HAVE SCANNED SINCE COMING TO THIS PLANET! YOU ARE BOTH WARM...AND COLD.
I AM ROM--SPACEKNIGHT--SON OF GOLDEN GALADOR, A CYBORG GRAFT OF MAN AND MACHINE.
AND YOU HAVE SLAIN MANY OF MY ARCH-FOES.
FOR THAT, I THANK YOU.
HOWEVER, MY ENERGY ANALYZER HAS ALSO REVEALED THAT YOU CONTAIN THE LIFE-ENERGIES OF A NUMBER OF YOUNG HUMANS WITHIN YOUR ESSENCE.
NOW THAT YOU HAVE FED YOUR FILL ON WRAITHKIND, I MUST ASK YOU TO RETURN THE HUMANS' LIFE-ENERGIES TO THEM--
--THAT THEY MAY LIVE, AS YOU LIVE.
YOU WOULD HAVE ME GIVE BACK THAT WHICH I HAVE TAKEN? THAT WOULD DISSIPATE THE MUTUALITY OF THE BODY!
SUCH A REQUEST MAY NEVER BE GRANTED!
AND HE WHO WOULD ASK IT REVEALS HIMSELF TO BE... AN ENEMY!
STARDUST STRIKES OUT WITH BOLTS OF PUREST STARSTUFF...
23

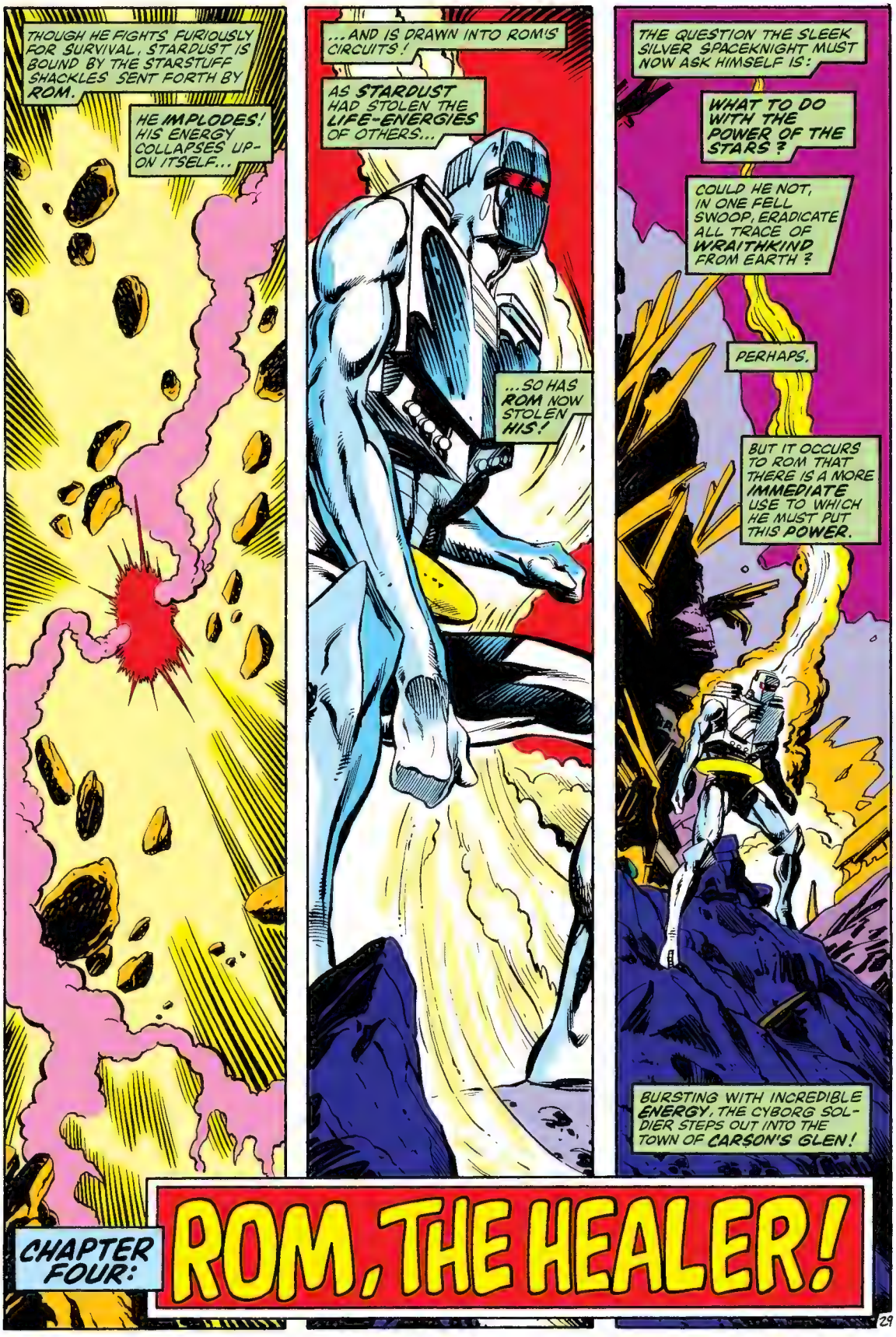

...WHICH, FLOWING OVER ROM, ATTEMPT TO CONSUME HIM!
NO! NOTHING SHALL DESTROY THE INTEGRITY OF MY ARMOR!
SKRASH
DIVERTING ALL POWER TO DEFENSE, ROM'S CYBORG ARMOR SETS UP A SURFACE FIELD, THAT ACTS MUCH LIKE ELECTROMAGNETIC ANTIBODIES, REJECTING THE CLOYING STARSTUFF BEFORE IT CAN DO HIM HARM.
THEN ROM RETURNS TO DEAL WITH STARDUST.
I ASKED YOU ONCE, VILLAIN--
-- NOW I AM COMMANDING YOU:
RETURN THE HUMANS' LIFE-ENERGIES, OR SUFFER THE WRATH OF ROM!
WRATH? WHAT IS YOUR, WRATH, SEMI-HUMAN, COMPARED TO THE WRATH OF STARDUST?!
I WAS DEEMED DEADLIEST OF MY RACE, ROM-- BANISHED BECAUSE I DARED TRY TO MAKE THE MUTUALITY OF THE BODY MY OWN!
24


DOESN'T THAT SUGGEST A POWER FAR BEYOND YOUR WILDEST DREAMS?
AGAIN SOMETHING IS CREATED OUT OF SHIMMERING STARSTUFF!
SOMETHING HORRIBLE!
THE ENTITY POSSESSES MANY, MANY TIMES THE MASS OF ROM. THE SPACE-KNIGHT CANNOT HARM IT...
...BUT IT STRIKES HIM A STAGGERING BLOW THAT DRIVES THE SILVER SPACE-KNIGHT BACK TOWARDS ITS CREATOR.
AND THAT IS BUT A SMALL SAMPLING OF MY POWER!
SHALL I ABSORB YOUR LIFE-ENERGIES NOW, GALADORIAN--
--OR LET MY CREATURE TOY WITH YOU AWHILE?
AGAIN THE STARSTUFF TENTACLES WRITHE UP TO EMBRACE ROM!
IT WISHES TO FEED UPON YOU EVEN AS I DO, SEMI-HUMAN! ALL THAT IS COMPOSED OF STARSTUFF POSSESSES THE URGE TO GROW INTO A BODY ALL ITS OWN!
HIS CIRCUITS SCRAMBLED BY THE STARSTUFF CREATURE, ROM FINDS HIMSELF ON THE VERGE OF DEFEAT... AND CONSUMPTION!
SOON YOU WILL BE ONE WITH ME, ROM!
SOON YOU WILL HAVE NO DESIRE TO FIGHT THE BODY!
SOON YOU WILL WANT NOTHING MORE THAN TO DEFEND ITS MUTUALITY!
25

OUTSIDE THE POWER PLANT, THE REMAINING DIRE WRAITHS GATHER...
ROM IS BATTLING THE STAR-CREATURE...
...DIVERTING ITS ATTENTION FROM US!
WHICHEVER ONE WINS, WE ARE STILL ENDANGERED!
PROJECT JAMMER IS DESTROYED! WE MUST FLEE!
BUT OUR JAMMER SECRETS ARE STORED IN THIS VAN--WE CANNOT LEAVE IT TO BE FOUND BY ROM!
AND, UNFORTUNATELY, THAT LEAVES ONLY ROOM ENOUGH IN THE VAN FOR TWO!
TH-THEY'RE DRIVING OFF WITHOUT US--LEAVING US TO DIE!
DON'T BE A FOOL! WE ARE ALL EXPENDABLE! BESIDES, WE MAY STILL ESCAPE--
--BY ASSUMING ANY SHAPE WE CHOOSE AND FLEEING FROM CARSON'S GLEN!
ONLY THIS TOWN IS LOST TO US! THERE ARE COUNTLESS OTHERS ON EARTH IN WHICH TO START ANEW!
AND, INSIDE THE POWER PLANT--
STARSTUFF BONDS, SIMILAR TO THOSE WHICH RING ME, NOW BIND YOU, SPACEKNIGHT...
...AND, HELD HELPLESS IN THEIR CIRCLE, YOU CANNOT PREVENT ME FROM ANALYZING YOU!
STARDUST'S EYES SEEM TO PENETRATE TO ROM'S VERY SOUL, STRIPPING ASIDE THE SHELL OF PLANDANIUM ARMOR AND REVEALING THE MAN WITHIN.
IT IS NOT A PLEASANT SENSATION.
CREATURE, YOU HAVE DEFILED ME WITH YOUR UNHOLY EXAMINATION.
ANY INCLINATION I MIGHT HAVE HAD TO SHOW YOU MERCY EXISTS NO LONGER.
26


I HAVE SUFFERED YOUR POWER, NOW YOU SHALL SUFFER MINE!
THE POWER OF GALADOR'S GREATEST WEAPON--
--THE NEUTRALIZER OF ROM, SPACEKNIGHT!
VREEE
AS ITS NAME IMPLIES, THE NEUTRALIZER NEUTRALIZES ENERGY IN ALL ITS MYRIAD FORMS...
...AMONG THOSE FORMS BEING THE STARSTUFF BONDS THAT BIND BOTH ROM AND STARDUST.
INCREDIBLE! YOU HAVE ACHIEVED WHAT I DESPITE ALL MY POWER, COULD NOT!
YOU HAVE SHATTERED THE STARSTUFF BANDS IMPOSED UPON ME BY THE BODY!
YOU HAVE FREED ME, THAT I MIGHT UNLEASH ALL MY LATENT POWER AGAINST YOU!
ARRGHH!
I HAVE ERRED MOST GRIEVOUSLY!
I HAVE FREED STARDUST FROM THE LIMITATIONS IMPOSED UPON HIM BY SOME ENTITY HE CALLS "THE BODY!"
EVEN NOW HE SHEDS HIS HUMANOID SHAPE AND MERGES WITH THE VERY FABRIC OF SPACE!
HIS POWER IS VAST; EVIL; UNLIMITED!
AND YET, THE BODY CONTAINED HIM -- BY ENCIRCLING HIM WITHIN HIS STARDUST BELT!
PERHAPS IF I CAN EMPLOY THIS BELT AGAINST STARDUST, ALL IS NOT LOST!
27


SWIRLING MADLY IN THE STAR-STORM CAUSED BY STARDUST, ROM DONS THE STARSTUFF BELT.
SENSORS INTERWOVEN THROUGHOUT HIS CYBORG CIRCUITS ANALYZE THE STARSTUFF.
MASTERING THE BELT, ROM REALIZES ITS PURPOSE WAS TO CONTAIN STARDUST'S AWESOME POWERS.
IF IT COULD DO SO ONCE, SURELY IT CAN DO SO AGAIN!
BUT THIS TIME IT IS NOT THE INFINITE ENTITY, THE BODY THAT COMMANDS THE STARSTUFF TO BIND STARDUST... IT IS ROM OF GALADOR--THE GREATEST SPACEKNIGHT OF THEM ALL!
28

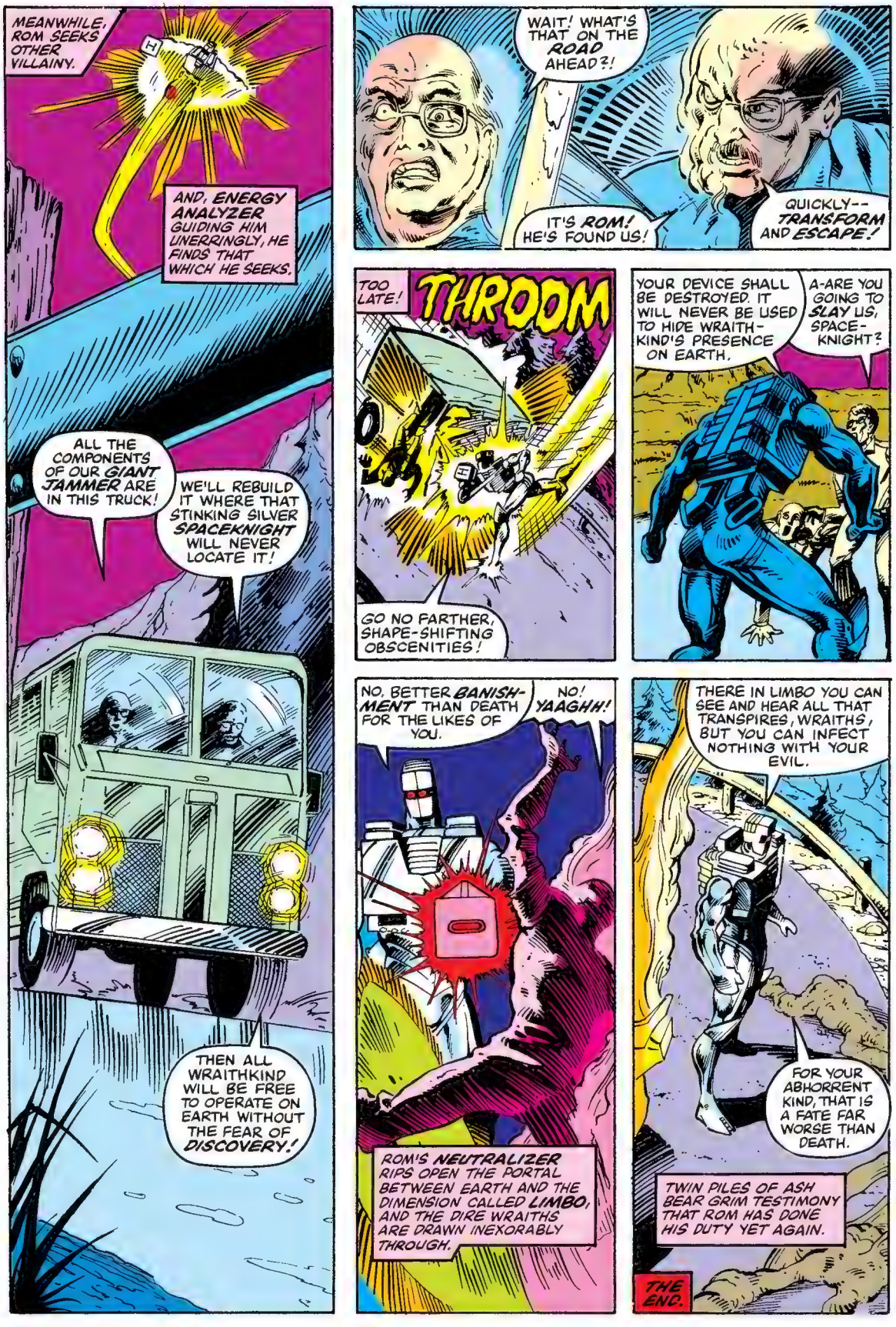

THOUGH HE FIGHTS FURIOUSLY FOR SURVIVAL, STARDUST IS BOUND BY THE STARSTUFF SHACKLES SENT FORTH BY ROM.
HE IMPLODES! HIS ENERGY COLLAPSES UPON ITSELF...
...AND IS DRAWN INTO ROM'S CIRCUITS!
AS STARDUST HAD STOLEN THE LIFE-ENERGIES OF OTHERS...
...SO HAS ROM NOW STOLEN HIS!
THE QUESTION THE SLEEK SILVER SPACEKNIGHT MUST NOW ASK HIMSELF IS:
WHAT TO DO WITH THE POWER OF THE STARS?
COULD HE NOT, IN ONE FELL SWOOP, ERADICATE ALL TRACE OF WRAITHKIND FROM EARTH?
PERHAPS.
BUT IT OCCURS TO ROM THAT THERE IS A MORE IMMEDIATE USE TO WHICH HE MUST PUT THIS POWER.
BURSTING WITH INCREDIBLE ENERGY, THE CYBORG SOLDIER STEPS OUT INTO THE TOWN OF CARSON'S GLEN!
CHAPTER FOUR:
ROM, THE HEALER!
29

THE TOWNSPEOPLE HAVE GATHERED AROUND THEIR DEMOLISHED POWER PLANT...
...WAITING TO SEE WHO, OR WHAT, WOULD EMERGE.
IT'S THE ROBOT!
HE AIMS TO DESTROY THE ENTIRE TOWN!
AND I DON'T AIM TO LET HIM!
BULLETS WON'T STOP ROM, SHERIFF!
YA ALREADY SAW THAT BACK UP IN THE HILLS!
I AIN'T AIMIN' AT THE ROBOT, GENTS--
"--BUT AT THE HIGH-TENSION WIRES HANGIN' OVER HIS HEAD!"
KRAK
TLANG
ZZRAK
HUNDREDS OF THOUSANDS OF VOLTS OF ELECTRICITY ENVELOP THE SPACEKNIGHT CALLED ROM.
HE SHEDS THEM AS A DUCK SHEDS WATER.
HE'S STILL COMING!
WE'RE DIRECTLY IN HIS PATH!
RUN-- BEFORE HE KILLS US ALL!
30

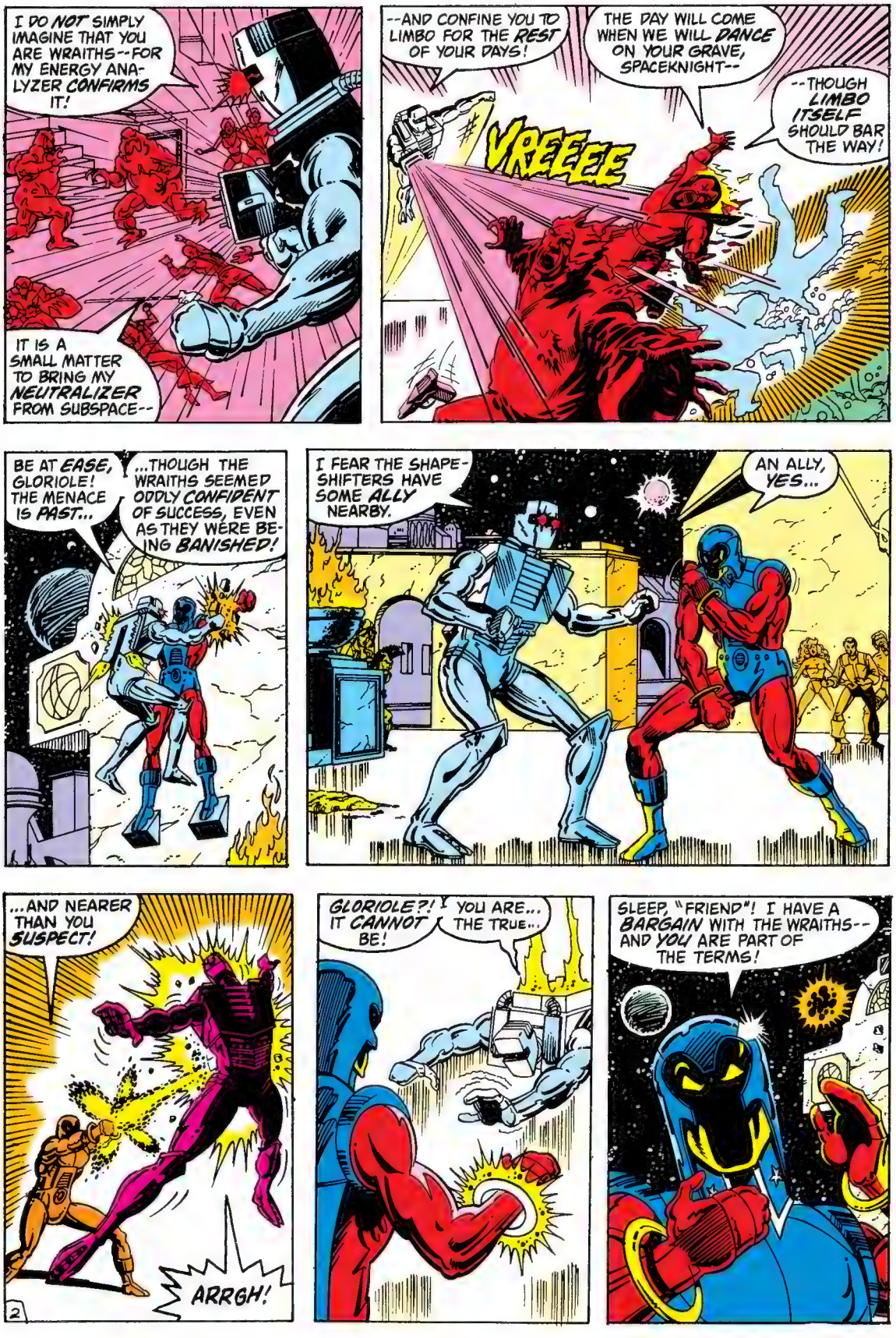
BUT...
H-HE'S IGNORING US... WALKING PAST US AS IF WE DIDN'T EXIST--
--HEADING FOR THE CHURCH!
BUT THAT'S WHERE WE TOOK THE KIDS! HE'S STILL AFTER OUR CHILDREN!
INSIDE...
THE ROBOT!
WHAT DO YOU WANT HERE?!
THE CHILDREN.
DO NOT BE AFRAID. I CAME NOT TO HARM--
--BUT TO HEAL!
AN INCREDIBLE INCANDESCENCE ILLUMINATES THE SANCTUARY, BATHING THE COMATOSE CHILDREN IN ITS MULTICOLORED GLOW.
IT IS THE POWER OF STARDUST, HELD SO LONG WITHIN ROM THAT IT NEARLY BURNED OUT EVERY CIRCUIT IN HIS SPACE-KNIGHT ARMOR.
MOMMY? ARE YOU THERE, MOMMY?
31

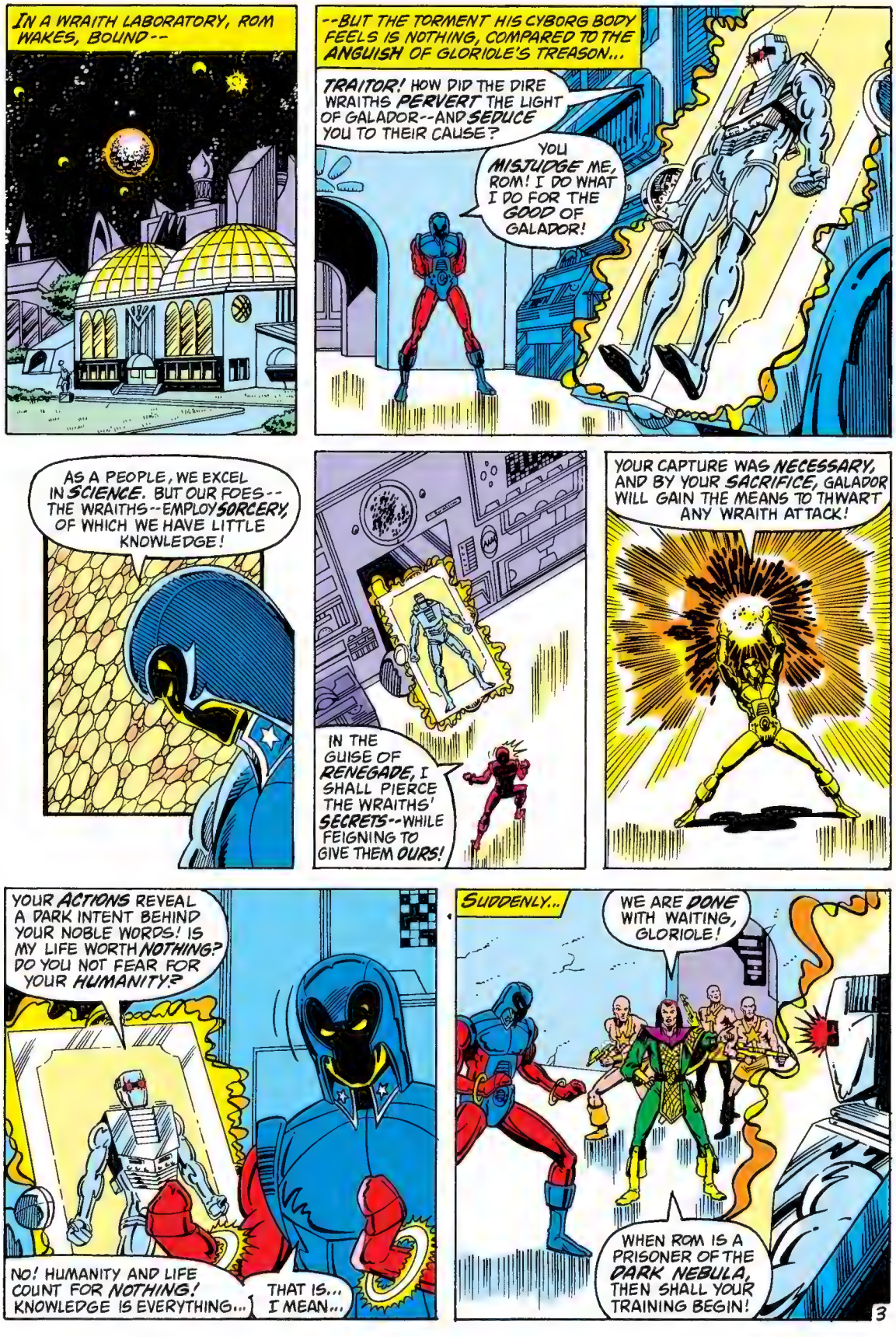
I FELT SO BAD-- BUT I'M BETTER NOW!
ME, TOO!
THAT WHICH WAS TAKEN FROM YOU... HAS BEEN RESTORED.
IT WAS YOU WHO HELPED US, WASN'T IT? I SAW A GREAT LIGHT...
...AND A FACE SO NOBLE, SO KIND, SMILING DOWN AT ME FROM A ZILLION MILES AWAY!
IT WAS A MAN'S FACE-- AND HE HAD LONG BLACK HAIR!
IS THAT WHAT YOU LOOK LIKE INSIDE THAT SUIT, MISTER?
YES.
THAT IS WHAT I LOOKED LIKE...
...ONCE.
ROM LEAVES THE CHURCH AS PARENTS EMBRACE THEIR CHILDREN.
OUTSIDE...
I'M TAKIN' YOU IN-- FOR MURDER!
H-HOLD IT RIGHT THERE, ROBOT!
NO ONE HAS BEEN MURDERED TODAY, MAN OF EARTH, SAVE THOSE WHO COULD NOT TRULY HAVE BEEN SAID TO HAVE EXISTED.
AND ITS CHILDREN HAVE BEEN SAVED!
CARSON'S GLEN HAS BEEN CLEANSED OF ALL WHO WHO WOULD HAVE DONE IT EVIL.
THERE IS NO DISPUTING THAT LAST STATEMENT. THE SHERIFF LOWERS HIS GUN.
32

I CAME IN PEACE, SEEKING AN EVIL IN YOUR MIDST. INSTEAD, I FOUND AN EVEN GREATER PERIL THAN I DARED EVER IMAGINE. BOTH THREATS ARE GONE NOW. CARSON'S GLEN HAS BEEN CLEANSED.
AND YOU, CHILDREN OF EARTH, HAVE BEEN MADE WHOLE AGAIN.
I PRAY YOU LIVE LONG AND PROSPER, AND NEVER KNOW FEAR AGAIN--
--THOUGH I SUSPECT FEAR OF ALL THAT IS ALIEN IS FAR TOO ENGRAINED IN THE HUMAN RACE TO EVER TRULY BE BANISHED.
I-I DUNNO. MAYBE NEXT TIME WE'LL BELIEVE.
...AND TRUST.
ON THAT DAY, MAN OF EARTH, THE CYBORG HEART OF ROM, SPACE-KNIGHT, WILL CRY FOR JOY!
ROCKET-PODS FIRING, ROM IS GONE.
OUTSIDE OF CARSON'S GLEN, ROM REMOVES THE STARSTUFF BONDS, INSIDE WHICH THE EVIL ENTITY CALLED STARDUST IS TRAPPED. STARDUST IS SAPPED OF ALL BUT THAT ENERGY HE NEEDS TO SURVIVE AND IS HELPLESS TO RESIST.
YOU SOUGHT--BY STEALING THE LIVES OF OTHERS--TO BECOME MORE THAN YOU DESERVED.
NOW, BOUND IN STARSTUFF, YOU ARE LESS THAN WHAT YOU WERE.
DEPART, CREATURE OF MALICE. GO BACK TO THE STARS WHENCE YOU CAME.
THE STARSTUFF BONDS DISSIPATE, VANISH LIKE MOTES OF LIGHT. PERHAPS T'URIN G'AR HAS BEEN SUMMONED BACK TO THE BODY TO ANSWER FOR THIS NEW OFFENSE?
33


MEANWHILE, ROM SEEKS OTHER VILLAINY.
AND, ENERGY ANALYZER GUIDING HIM UNERRINGLY, HE FINDS THAT WHICH HE SEEKS.
ALL THE COMPONENTS OF OUR GIANT JAMMER ARE IN THIS TRUCK!
WE'LL REBUILD IT WHERE THAT STINKING SILVER SPACEKNIGHT WILL NEVER LOCATE IT!
THEN ALL WRAITHKIND WILL BE FREE TO OPERATE ON EARTH WITHOUT THE FEAR OF DISCOVERY!
WAIT! WHAT'S THAT ON THE ROAD AHEAD?!
IT'S ROM! HE'S FOUND US!
QUICKLY-- TRANSFORM AND ESCAPE!
TOO LATE!
THROOM
GO NO FARTHER, SHAPE-SHIFTING OBSCENITIES!
YOUR DEVICE SHALL BE DESTROYED. IT WILL NEVER BE USED TO HIDE WRAITH-KIND'S PRESENCE ON EARTH.
A-ARE YOU GOING TO SLAY US, SPACE-KNIGHT?
NO. BETTER BANISHMENT THAN DEATH FOR THE LIKES OF YOU.
NO! YAAGHH!
ROM'S NEUTRALIZER RIPS OPEN THE PORTAL BETWEEN EARTH AND THE DIMENSION CALLED LIMBO, AND THE DIRE WRAITHS ARE DRAWN INEXORABLY THROUGH.
THERE IN LIMBO YOU CAN SEE AND HEAR ALL THAT TRANSPIRES, WRAITHS, BUT YOU CAN INFECT NOTHING WITH YOUR EVIL.
FOR YOUR ABHORRENT KIND, THAT IS A FATE FAR WORSE THAN DEATH.
TWIN PILES OF ASH BEAR GRIM TESTIMONY THAT ROM HAS DONE HIS DUTY YET AGAIN.
THE END.

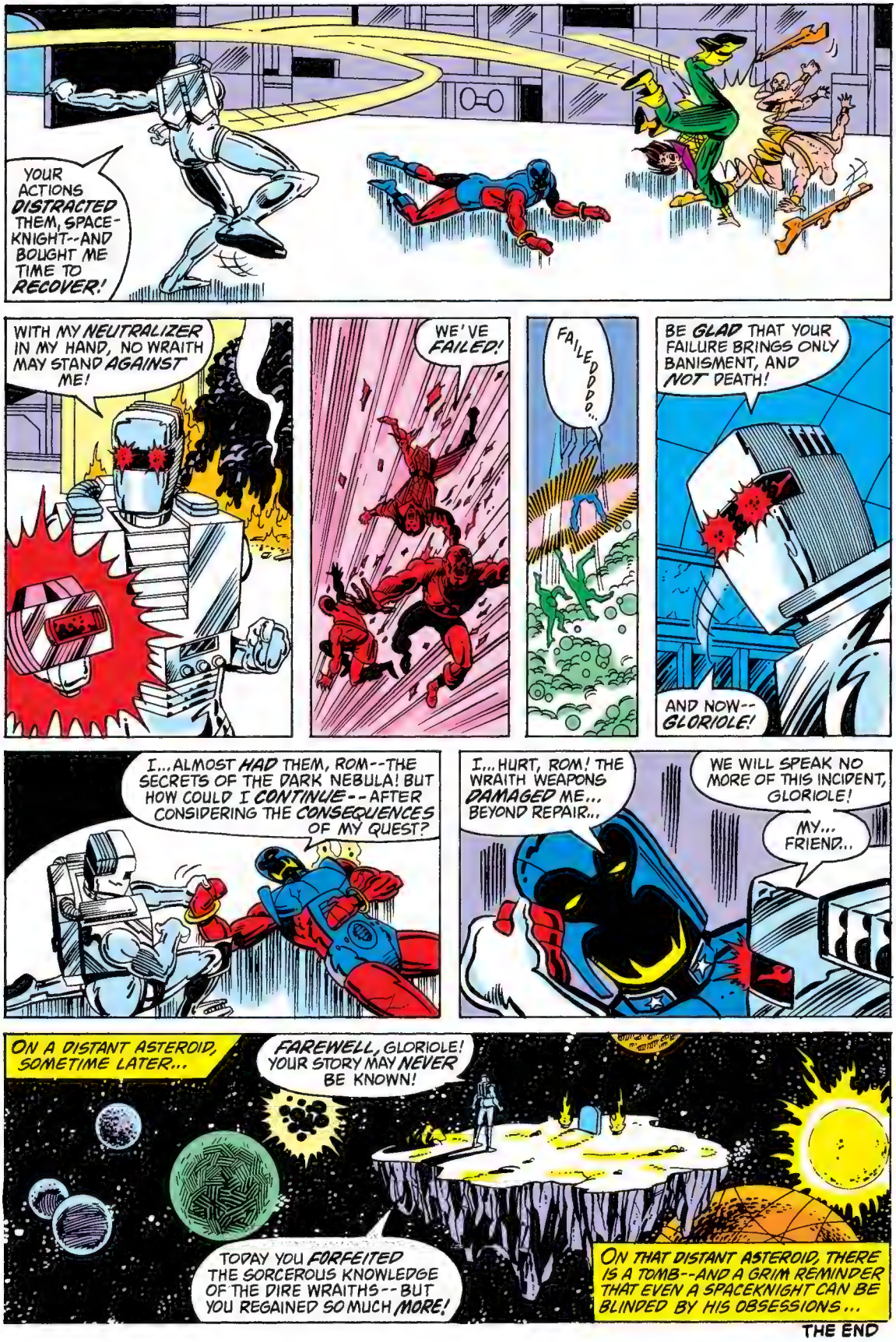
THE TIME IS 200 YEARS AGO. AFTER LEAVING GALADOR,* ROM RECEIVES A DISTRESS CALL-- FROM A FELLOW SPACEKNIGHT...
THERE, IN THAT DARK CLOUD, IS THE SOURCE OF THE SUMMONS!
TRAITOR!
GODS OF GALADOR! IT IS GLORIOLE--WHO IS AMONG OUR THINKERS SECOND ONLY TO THE PRIME DIRECTOR HIMSELF!
WHO COULD HAVE DONE THIS THING TO HIM?
A GRANT/LaROCQUE/MAGYAR/KAWECKI/ SEAN /MILGROM PRODUCTION-- BROUGHT TO YOU BY JIM SHOOTER
R-ROM, MY OLD FRIEND? OR IS THIS ANOTHER TRICK OF THE DIRE WRAITHS?
IF ROM YOU ARE--BEWARE!
TOO LATE, SPACEKNIGHT! OUR TRAP IS SPRUNG!
WRAITHS!
NOW, ROM, THERE IS NO ESCAPE FOR YOU--FOR MORE FORCES ARE AT WORK HERE THAN YOU IMAGINE!


I DO NOT SIMPLY IMAGINE THAT YOU ARE WRAITHS--FOR MY ENERGY ANALYZER CONFIRMS IT!
IT IS A SMALL MATTER TO BRING MY NEUTRALIZER FROM SUBSPACE--
--AND CONFINE YOU TO LIMBO FOR THE REST OF YOUR DAYS!
THE DAY WILL COME WHEN WE WILL DANCE ON YOUR GRAVE, SPACEKNIGHT--
--THOUGH LIMBO ITSELF SHOULD BAR THE WAY!
VREEEE
BE AT EASE, GLORIOLE! THE MENACE IS PAST...
...THOUGH THE WRAITHS SEEMED ODDLY CONFIDENT OF SUCCESS, EVEN AS THEY WERE BEING BANISHED!
I FEAR THE SHAPE-SHIFTERS HAVE SOME ALLY NEARBY.
AN ALLY, YES...
...AND NEARER THAN YOU SUSPECT!
ARRGH!
2
GLORIOLE?! IT CANNOT BE!
YOU ARE... THE TRUE...
SLEEP, "FRIEND"! I HAVE A BARGAIN WITH THE WRAITHS--AND YOU ARE PART OF THE TERMS!


IN A WRAITH LABORATORY, ROM WAKES, BOUND--
--BUT THE TORMENT HIS CYBORG BODY FEELS IS NOTHING, COMPARED TO THE ANGUISH OF GLORIOLE'S TREASON...
TRAITOR! HOW DID THE DIRE WRAITHS PERVERT THE LIGHT OF GALADOR--AND SEDUCE YOU TO THEIR CAUSE?
YOU MISJUDGE ME, ROM! I DO WHAT I DO FOR THE GOOD OF GALADOR!
AS A PEOPLE, WE EXCEL IN SCIENCE. BUT OUR FOES--THE WRAITHS--EMPLOY SORCERY, OF WHICH WE HAVE LITTLE KNOWLEDGE!
IN THE GUISE OF RENEGADE, I SHALL PIERCE THE WRAITHS' SECRETS--WHILE FEIGNING TO GIVE THEM OURS!
YOUR CAPTURE WAS NECESSARY, AND BY YOUR SACRIFICE, GALADOR WILL GAIN THE MEANS TO THWART ANY WRAITH ATTACK!
YOUR ACTIONS REVEAL A DARK INTENT BEHIND YOUR NOBLE WORDS! IS MY LIFE WORTH NOTHING? DO YOU NOT FEAR FOR YOUR HUMANITY?
NO! HUMANITY AND LIFE COUNT FOR NOTHING! KNOWLEDGE IS EVERYTHING...
THAT IS... I MEAN...
SUDDENLY...
WE ARE DONE WITH WAITING, GLORIOLE!
WHEN ROM IS A PRISONER OF THE DARK NEBULA, THEN SHALL YOUR TRAINING BEGIN!
3

SURELY THERE IS NO NEED TO TAKE HIM THERE!
OUR WRAITHLORDS DESIRE HIM FOR STUDY AND... ENTERTAINMENT! WITH THE SECRETS IN HIS ARMOR, WE MAY YET BREAK THE GATES OF LIMBO --AND LOOSE OUR BROTHERS!
WHERE IS YOUR WISDOM, GLORIOLE? CAN THE WRAITHS PLAY EVEN GALADOR'S GREATEST MINDS FOR FOOLS?
SILENCE!
GLORIOLE! WHERE... IS YOUR KNOWLEDGE... NOW?
PAY HIM NO MIND, APPRENTICE! YOU ARE ONE OF US NOW! LET OUR WISDOM BE ENOUGH FOR YOU!
YES! I... I...
WHAT... HAVE I BECOME...?
NO! THE GREATEST OF THE SPACEKNIGHTS SHALL NOT FALL TO SERVE MY PRIDE AND FOOLISHNESS!
WHATEVER THE COST, ROM WILL BE FREE!
VOOM!
4

SO! THE DOG RETURNS TO HIS OWN KENNEL!
YOU CHANGE SIDES TOO OFTEN, CUR! DIE AND BE DONE WITH YOU--
--AND WE WILL ATTEND TO ROM!
HA! HIS NEWFOUND HONOR DID HIM LITTLE GOOD!
I... HAVE NEVER... CARED FOR HONOR! YET ROM AIDED ME, WHEN HE THOUGHT I WAS IN DANGER!
AS A FELLOW SPACEKNIGHT... I COULD DO NO LESS FOR HIM!
YOU SURPRISE ME, BUT ONLY BECAUSE YOU CLING SO LONG TO LIFE!
STILL, I KNOW A CURE FOR THAT!
5
NO!
GLORIOLE'S ACT OF CONTRITION HAS WON ME MY FREEDOM, EVIL ONE!
NOOOOO...


YOUR ACTIONS DISTRACTED THEM, SPACE-KNIGHT--AND BOUGHT ME TIME TO RECOVER!
WITH MY NEUTRALIZER IN MY HAND, NO WRAITH MAY STAND AGAINST ME!
WE'VE FAILED!
FAILEDDDD...
BE GLAD THAT YOUR FAILURE BRINGS ONLY BANISMENT, AND NOT DEATH!
AND NOW--GLORIOLE!
I...ALMOST HAD THEM, ROM--THE SECRETS OF THE DARK NEBULA! BUT HOW COULD I CONTINUE--AFTER CONSIDERING THE CONSEQUENCES OF MY QUEST?
I...HURT, ROM! THE WRAITH WEAPONS DAMAGED ME... BEYOND REPAIR...
WE WILL SPEAK NO MORE OF THIS INCIDENT, GLORIOLE!
MY... FRIEND...
ON A DISTANT ASTEROID, SOMETIME LATER...
FAREWELL, GLORIOLE! YOUR STORY MAY NEVER BE KNOWN!
TODAY YOU FORFEITED THE SORCEROUS KNOWLEDGE OF THE DIRE WRAITHS--BUT YOU REGAINED SO MUCH MORE!
ON THAT DISTANT ASTEROID, THERE IS A TOMB--AND A GRIM REMINDER THAT EVEN A SPACEKNIGHT CAN BE BLINDED BY HIS OBSESSIONS...
THE END

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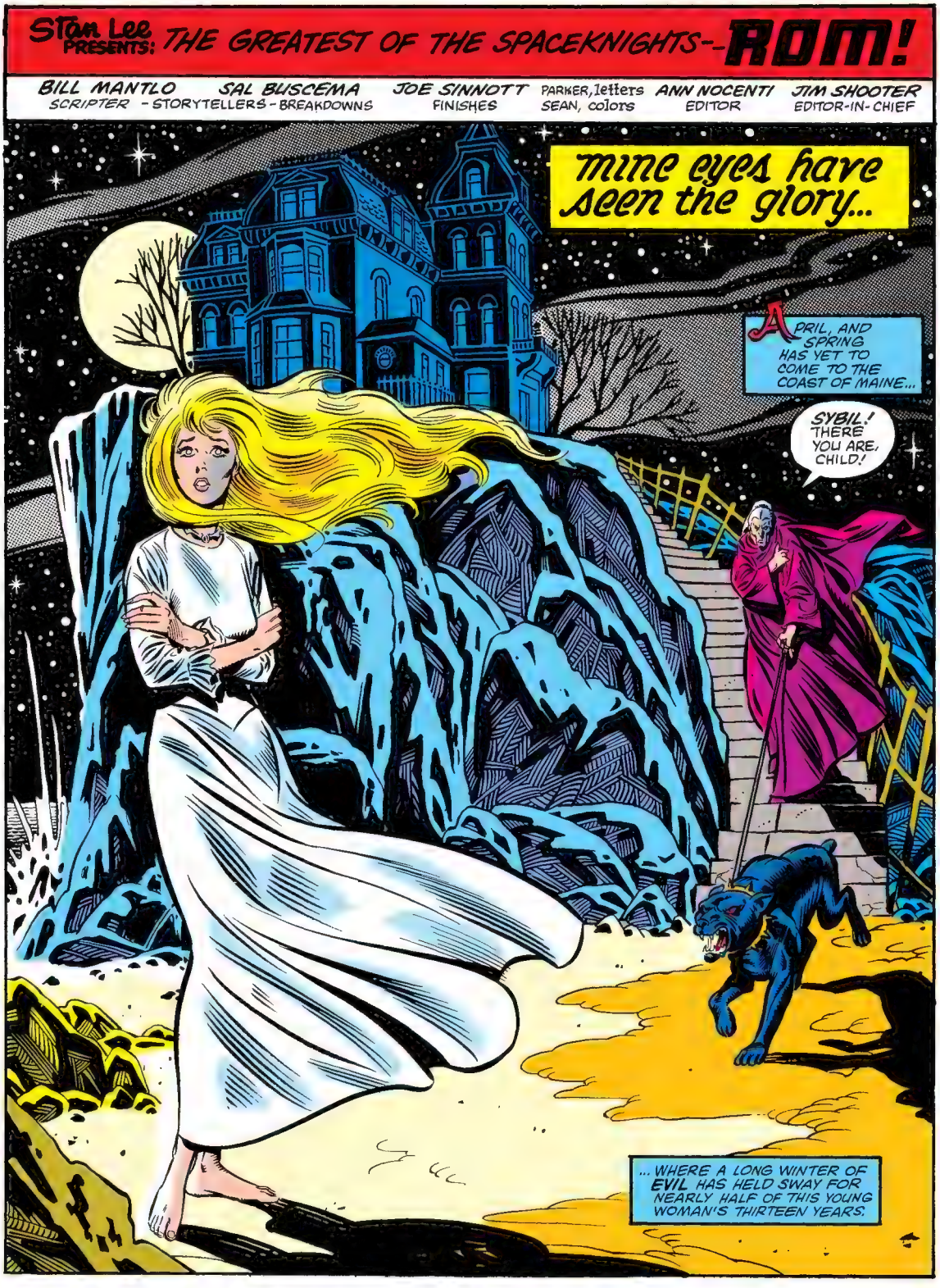
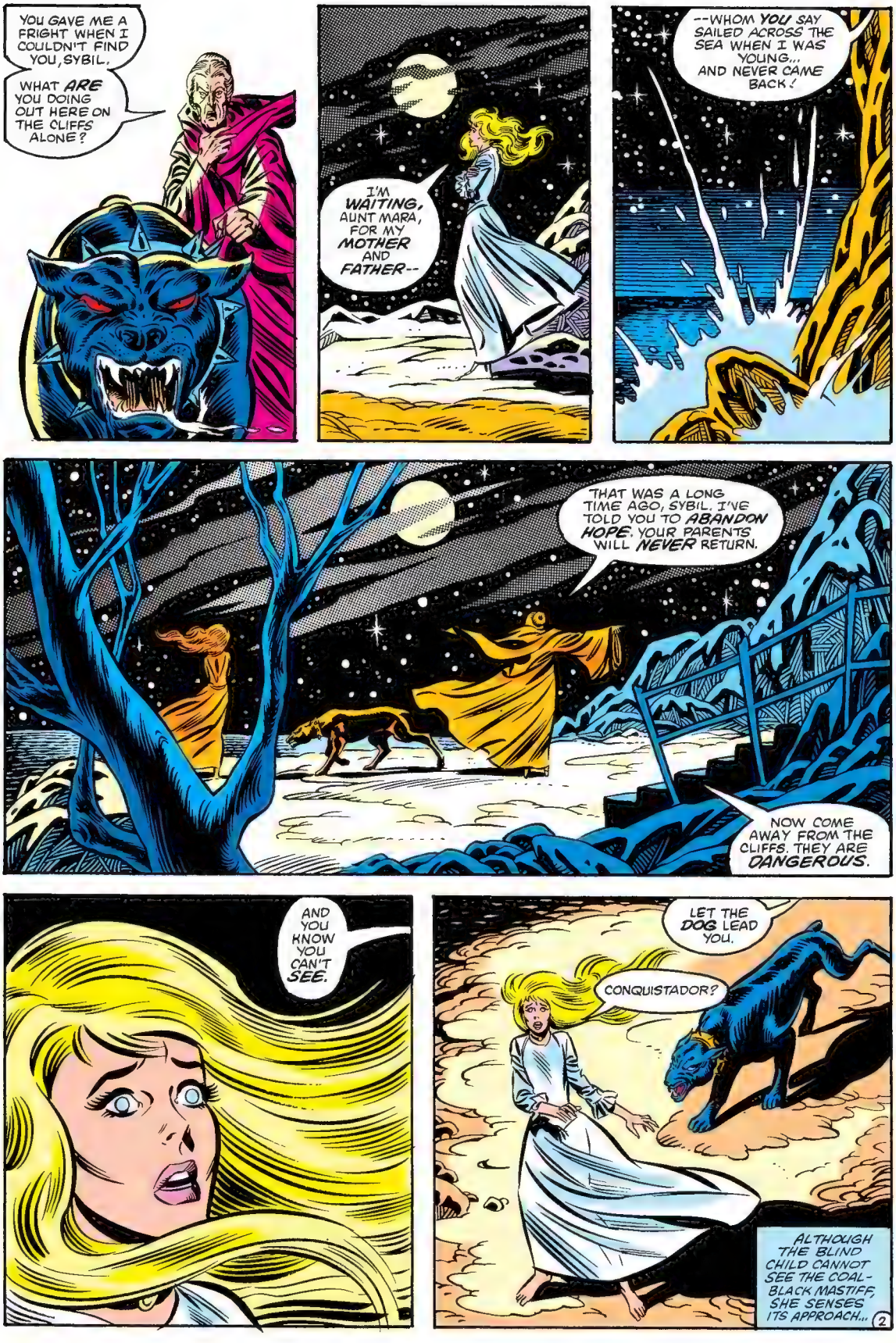
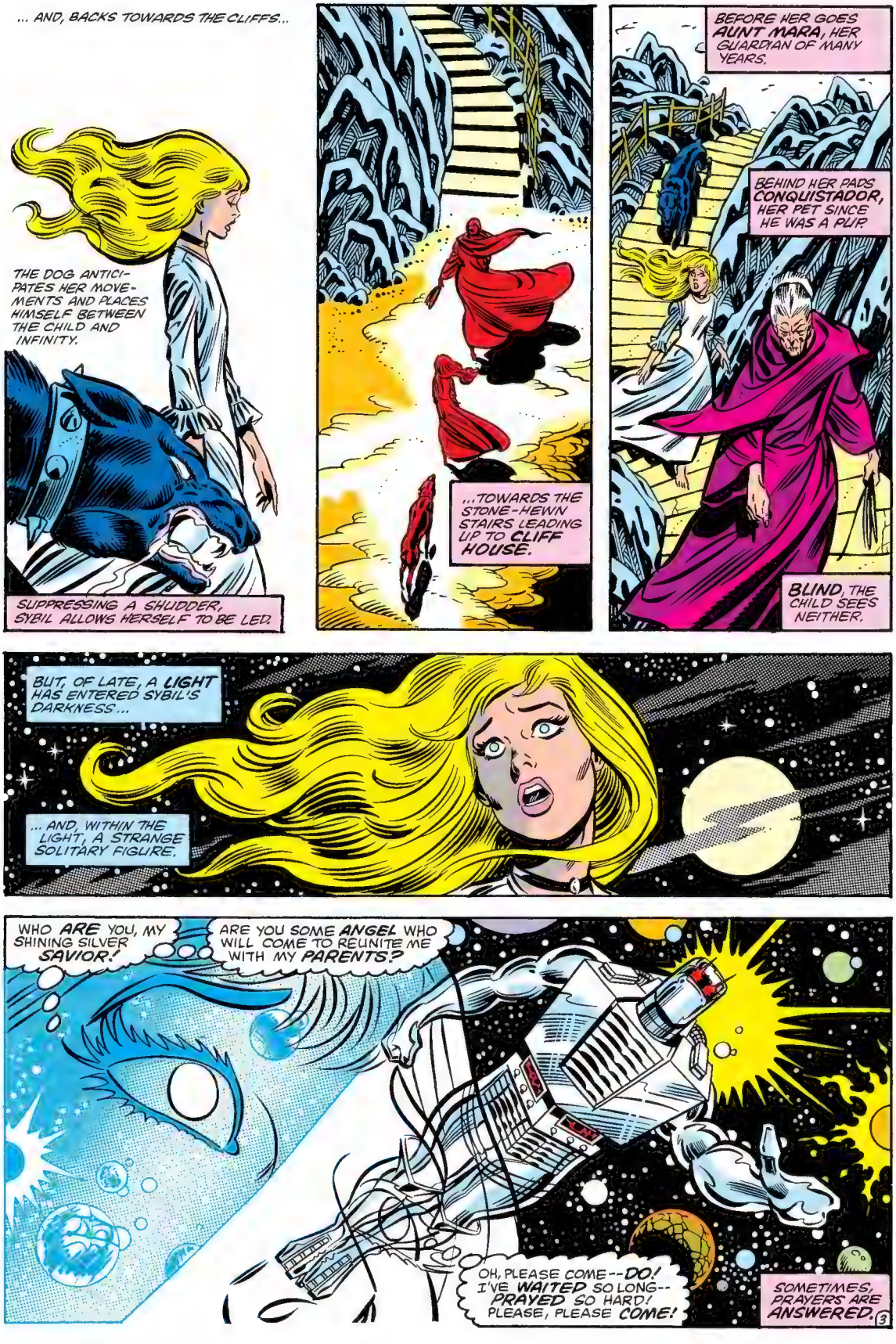
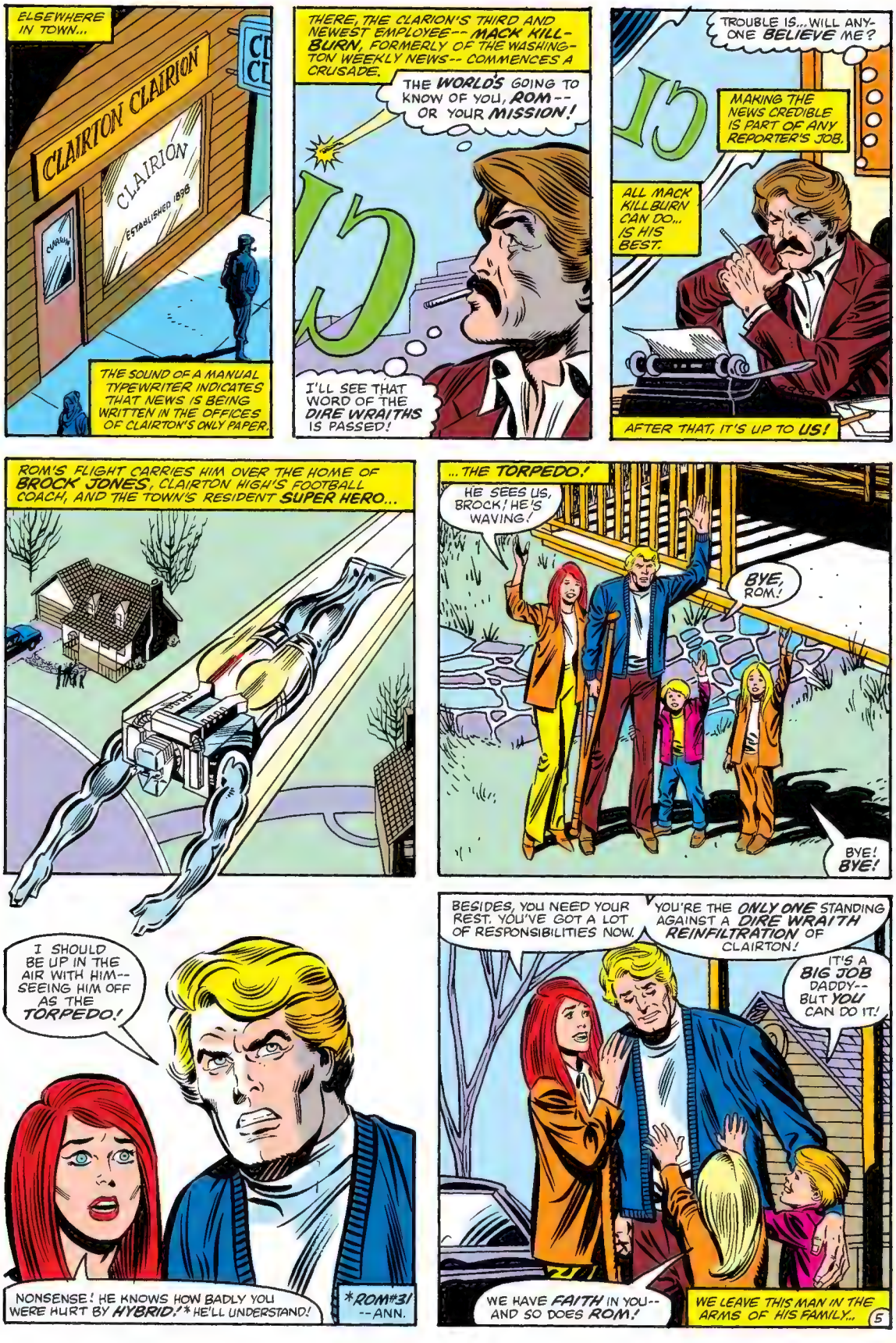
ROM™
MILGROM

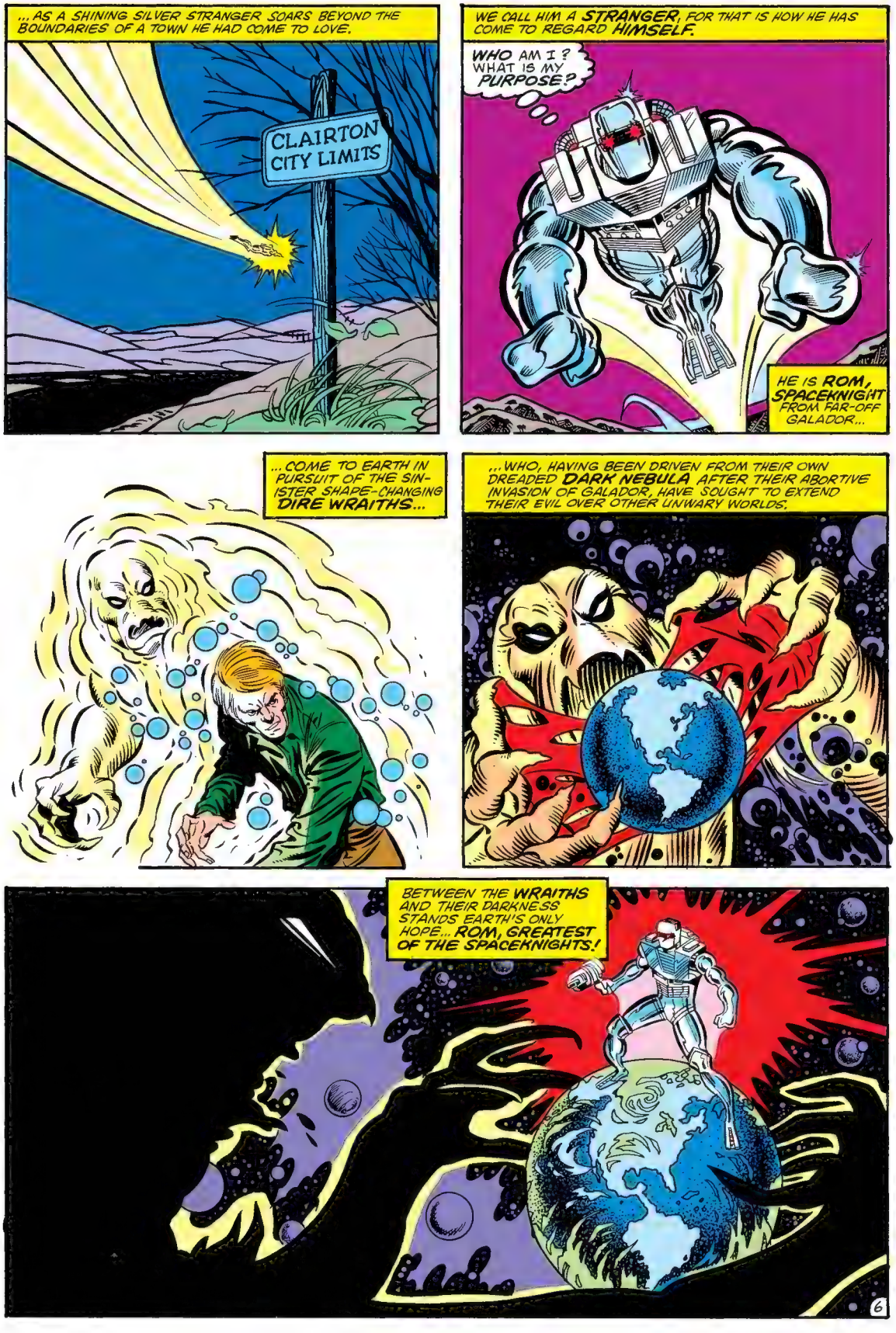

Stan Lee PRESENTS: THE GREATEST OF THE SPACEKNIGHTS--ROM!
BILL MANTLO SCRIPTER
SAL BUSCEMA - STORYTELLERS - BREAKDOWNS
JOE SINNOTT FINISHES
PARKER, letters SEAN, colors
ANN NOCENTI EDITOR
JIM SHOOTER EDITOR-IN-CHIEF
mine eyes have seen the glory...
APRIL, AND SPRING HAS YET TO COME TO THE COAST OF MAINE...
SYBIL! THERE YOU ARE, CHILD!
... WHERE A LONG WINTER OF EVIL HAS HELD SWAY FOR NEARLY HALF OF THIS YOUNG WOMAN'S THIRTEEN YEARS.

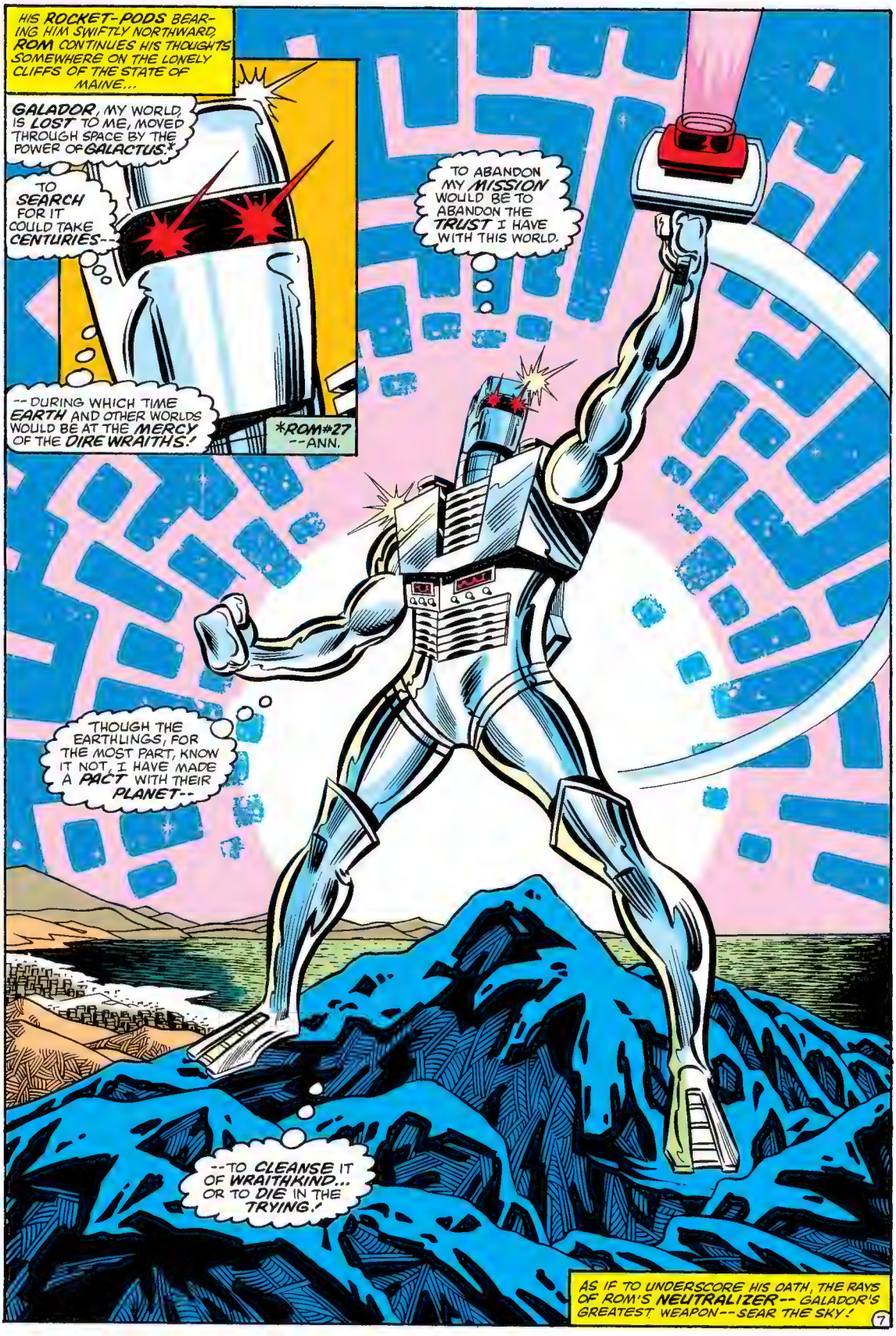

YOU GAVE ME A FRIGHT WHEN I COULDN'T FIND YOU, SYBIL.
WHAT ARE YOU DOING OUT HERE ON THE CLIFFS ALONE?
I'M WAITING, AUNT MARA, FOR MY MOTHER AND FATHER--
--WHOM YOU SAY SAILED ACROSS THE SEA WHEN I WAS YOUNG... AND NEVER CAME BACK!
THAT WAS A LONG TIME AGO, SYBIL. I'VE TOLD YOU TO ABANDON HOPE. YOUR PARENTS WILL NEVER RETURN.
NOW COME AWAY FROM THE CLIFFS. THEY ARE DANGEROUS.
AND YOU KNOW YOU CAN'T SEE.
LET THE DOG LEAD YOU.
CONQUISTADOR?
ALTHOUGH THE BLIND CHILD CANNOT SEE THE COAL-BLACK MASTIFF, SHE SENSES ITS APPROACH... 2

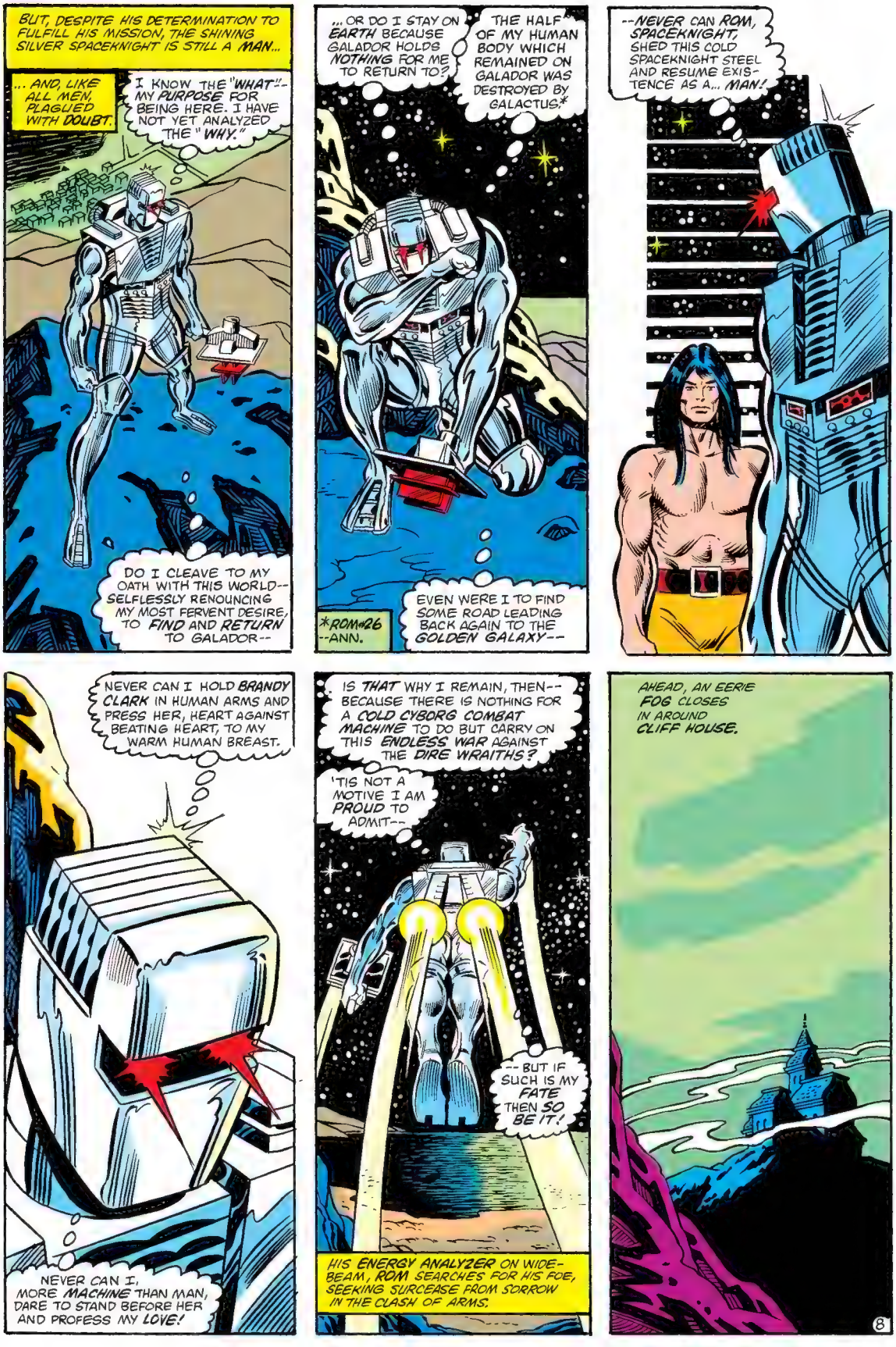

... AND, BACKS TOWARDS THE CLIFFS...
THE DOG ANTICIPATES HER MOVEMENTS AND PLACES HIMSELF BETWEEN THE CHILD AND INFINITY.
SUPPRESSING A SHUDDER, SYBIL ALLOWS HERSELF TO BE LED...
...TOWARDS THE STONE-HEWN STAIRS LEADING UP TO CLIFF HOUSE.
BEFORE HER GOES AUNT MARA, HER GUARDIAN OF MANY YEARS.
BEHIND HER PADS CONQUISTADOR, HER PET SINCE HE WAS A PUP.
BLIND, THE CHILD SEES NEITHER.
BUT, OF LATE, A LIGHT HAS ENTERED SYBIL'S DARKNESS...
... AND, WITHIN THE LIGHT, A STRANGE SOLITARY FIGURE.
WHO ARE YOU, MY SHINING SILVER SAVIOR!
ARE YOU SOME ANGEL WHO WILL COME TO REUNITE ME WITH MY PARENTS?
OH, PLEASE COME--DO! I'VE WAITED SO LONG-- PRAYED SO HARD! PLEASE, PLEASE COME!
SOMETIMES, PRAYERS ARE ANSWERED.
3

SPRING IS ALREADY IN FULL FLOWER IN THE COMMUNITY OF CLAIRTON, WEST VIRGINIA, WHEN ROM... SPACEKNIGHT... BIDS FINAL FAREWELL TO THE TOWN THAT HAS BEEN HIS HOME SINCE HIS ARRIVAL ON EARTH MANY MONTHS AGO.
SO THE BIG FELLA'S REALLY LEAVING?
BYE, ROM! WE'LL MISS YOU!
IF IT WASN'T FOR ROM, THERE'D BE NO CLAIRTON, TODAY!
WE'D ALL HAVE FALLEN VICTIM TO THE DIABOLICAL DIRE WRAITHS LONG AGO!
AMONG THE CITIZENRY ASSEMBLED TO SEE THEIR FRIEND AND SAVIOR DEPART, ARE TWO TO WHOM ROM WAS CLOSEST DURING HIS TIME IN CLAIRTON... STEVE JACKSON AND BRANDY CLARK.
HE'S OFF--TO SAVE OTHER TOWNS FROM THE DIRE WRAITHS.
GUESS HE NO LONGER HAD ANY REASON TO STAY HERE.
NO REASON, STEVE? HE HAD A HOME HERE, FRIENDS--
--AND SOMEONE WHO LOVED HIM DESPITE HIS SPACEKNIGHT ARMOR!
SO YOU DO LOVE ROM?
FROM THE FIRST MOMENT I MET HIM--'TIL THE DAY I DIE!
WHAT ABOUT US, BRANDY? WE WERE SUPPOSED TO BE ENGAGED?
I DON'T WANT TO TALK ABOUT THAT, STEVE--NOT NOW!
I JUST WANT TO FIND SOME WAY TO BE REUNITED WITH THE MAN I LOVE!
BUT ROM'S NOT A MAN, BRANDY!
THEN I'LL HAVE TO FIND SOME WAY TO NOT BE A WOMAN!
4

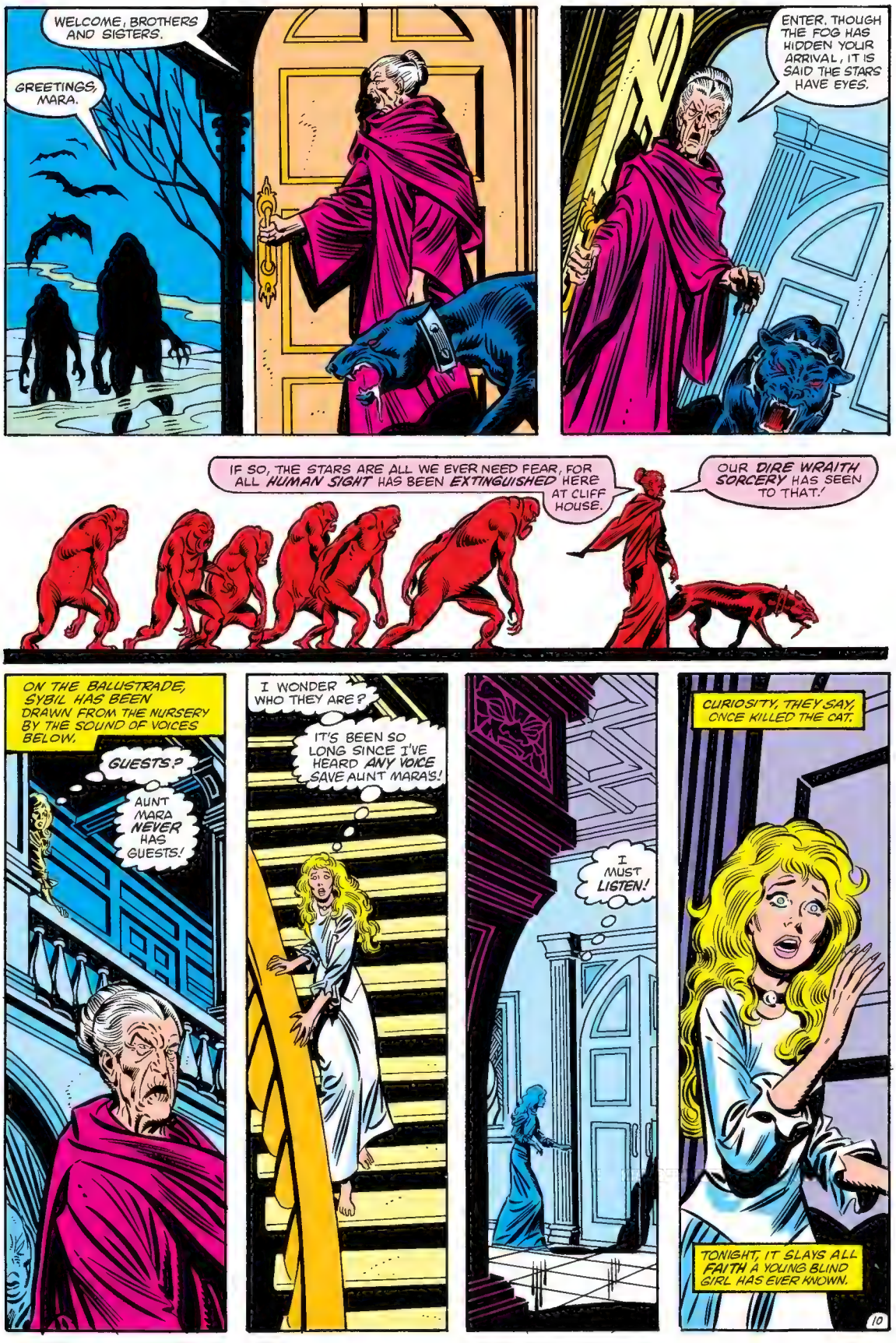

ELSEWHERE IN TOWN...
CLAIRTON CLARION
CLARION
ESTABLISHED 1896
THE SOUND OF A MANUAL TYPEWRITER INDICATES THAT NEWS IS BEING WRITTEN IN THE OFFICES OF CLAIRTON'S ONLY PAPER.
THERE, THE CLARION'S THIRD AND NEWEST EMPLOYEE--- MACK KILLBURN, FORMERLY OF THE WASHINGTON WEEKLY NEWS-- COMMENCES A CRUSADE.
THE WORLD'S GOING TO KNOW OF YOU, ROM-- OR YOUR MISSION!
I'LL SEE THAT WORD OF THE DIRE WRAITHS IS PASSED!
TROUBLE IS... WILL ANYONE BELIEVE ME?
MAKING THE NEWS CREDIBLE IS PART OF ANY REPORTER'S JOB.
ALL MACK KILLBURN CAN DO... IS HIS BEST.
AFTER THAT, IT'S UP TO US!
ROM'S FLIGHT CARRIES HIM OVER THE HOME OF BROCK JONES, CLAIRTON HIGH'S FOOTBALL COACH, AND THE TOWN'S RESIDENT SUPER HERO...
...THE TORPEDO!
HE SEES US, BROCK! HE'S WAVING!
BYE, ROM!
BYE! BYE!
I SHOULD BE UP IN THE AIR WITH HIM-- SEEING HIM OFF AS THE TORPEDO!
NONSENSE! HE KNOWS HOW BADLY YOU WERE HURT BY HYBRID!* HE'LL UNDERSTAND!
*ROM#31 --ANN.
BESIDES, YOU NEED YOUR REST. YOU'VE GOT A LOT OF RESPONSIBILITIES NOW.
YOU'RE THE ONLY ONE STANDING AGAINST A DIRE WRAITH REINFILTRATION OF CLAIRTON!
IT'S A BIG JOB DADDY-- BUT YOU CAN DO IT!
WE HAVE FAITH IN YOU-- AND SO DOES ROM!
WE LEAVE THIS MAN IN THE ARMS OF HIS FAMILY...
5

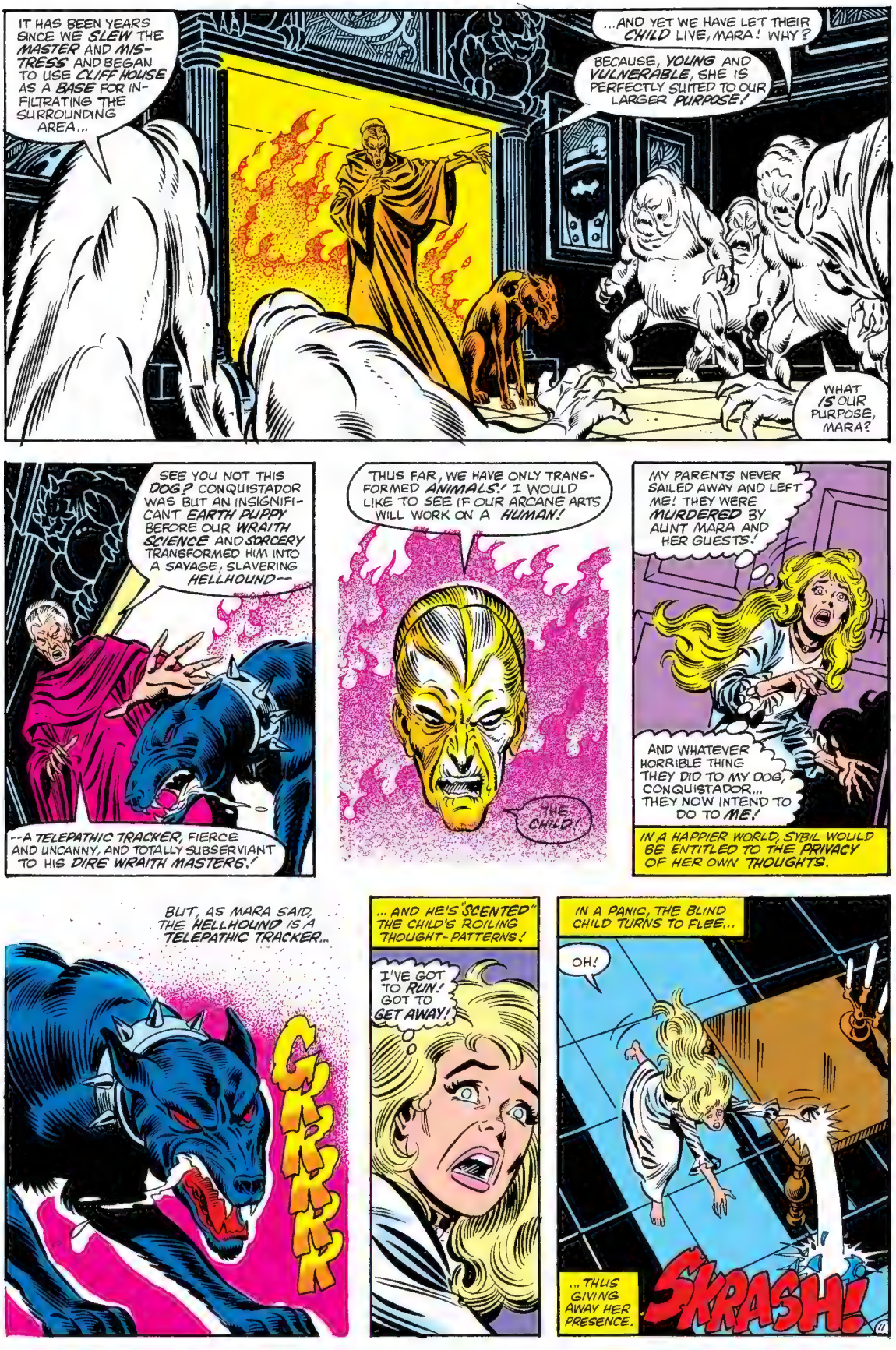

...AS A SHINING SILVER STRANGER SOARS BEYOND THE BOUNDARIES OF A TOWN HE HAD COME TO LOVE.
CLAIRTON CITY LIMITS
WE CALL HIM A STRANGER, FOR THAT IS HOW HE HAS COME TO REGARD HIMSELF.
WHO AM I? WHAT IS MY PURPOSE?
HE IS ROM, SPACEKNIGHT FROM FAR-OFF GALADOR...
...COME TO EARTH IN PURSUIT OF THE SINISTER SHAPE-CHANGING DIRE WRAITHS...
...WHO, HAVING BEEN DRIVEN FROM THEIR OWN DREADED DARK NEBULA AFTER THEIR ABORTIVE INVASION OF GALADOR, HAVE SOUGHT TO EXTEND THEIR EVIL OVER OTHER UNWARY WORLDS.
BETWEEN THE WRAITHS AND THEIR DARKNESS STANDS EARTH'S ONLY HOPE... ROM, GREATEST OF THE SPACEKNIGHTS!
6

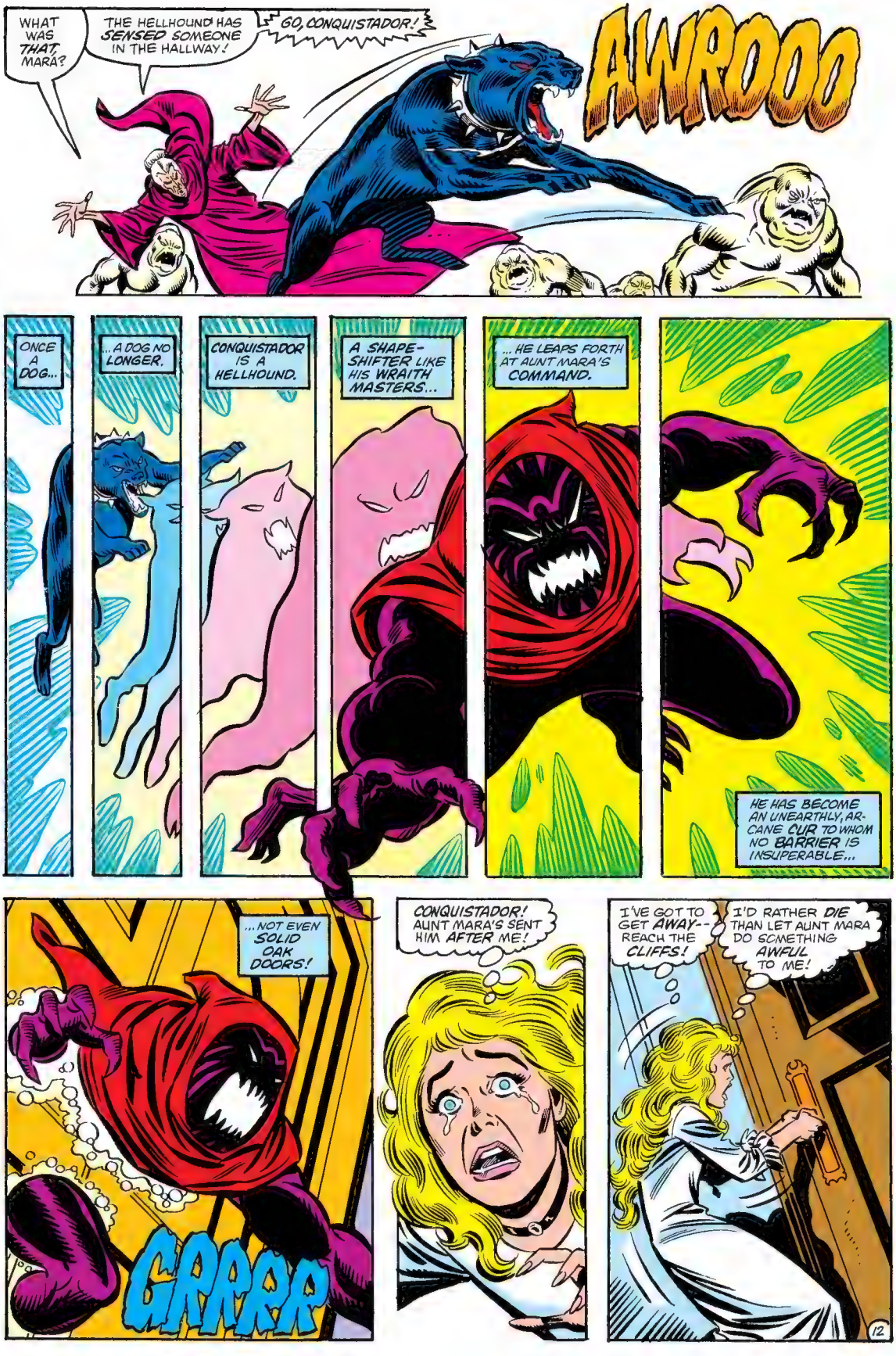

HIS ROCKET-PODS BEARING HIM SWIFTLY NORTHWARD, ROM CONTINUES HIS THOUGHTS SOMEWHERE ON THE LONELY CLIFFS OF THE STATE OF MAINE...
GALADOR, MY WORLD, IS LOST TO ME, MOVED THROUGH SPACE BY THE POWER OF GALACTUS.*
TO SEARCH FOR IT COULD TAKE CENTURIES--
--DURING WHICH TIME EARTH AND OTHER WORLDS WOULD BE AT THE MERCY OF THE DIRE WRAITHS!
*ROM #27 --ANN.
TO ABANDON MY MISSION WOULD BE TO ABANDON THE TRUST I HAVE WITH THIS WORLD.
THOUGH THE EARTHLINGS, FOR THE MOST PART, KNOW IT NOT, I HAVE MADE A PACT WITH THEIR PLANET--
--TO CLEANSE IT OF WRAITHKIND... OR TO DIE IN THE TRYING!
AS IF TO UNDERSCORE HIS OATH, THE RAYS OF ROM'S NEUTRALIZER-- GALADOR'S GREATEST WEAPON--SEAR THE SKY!
7

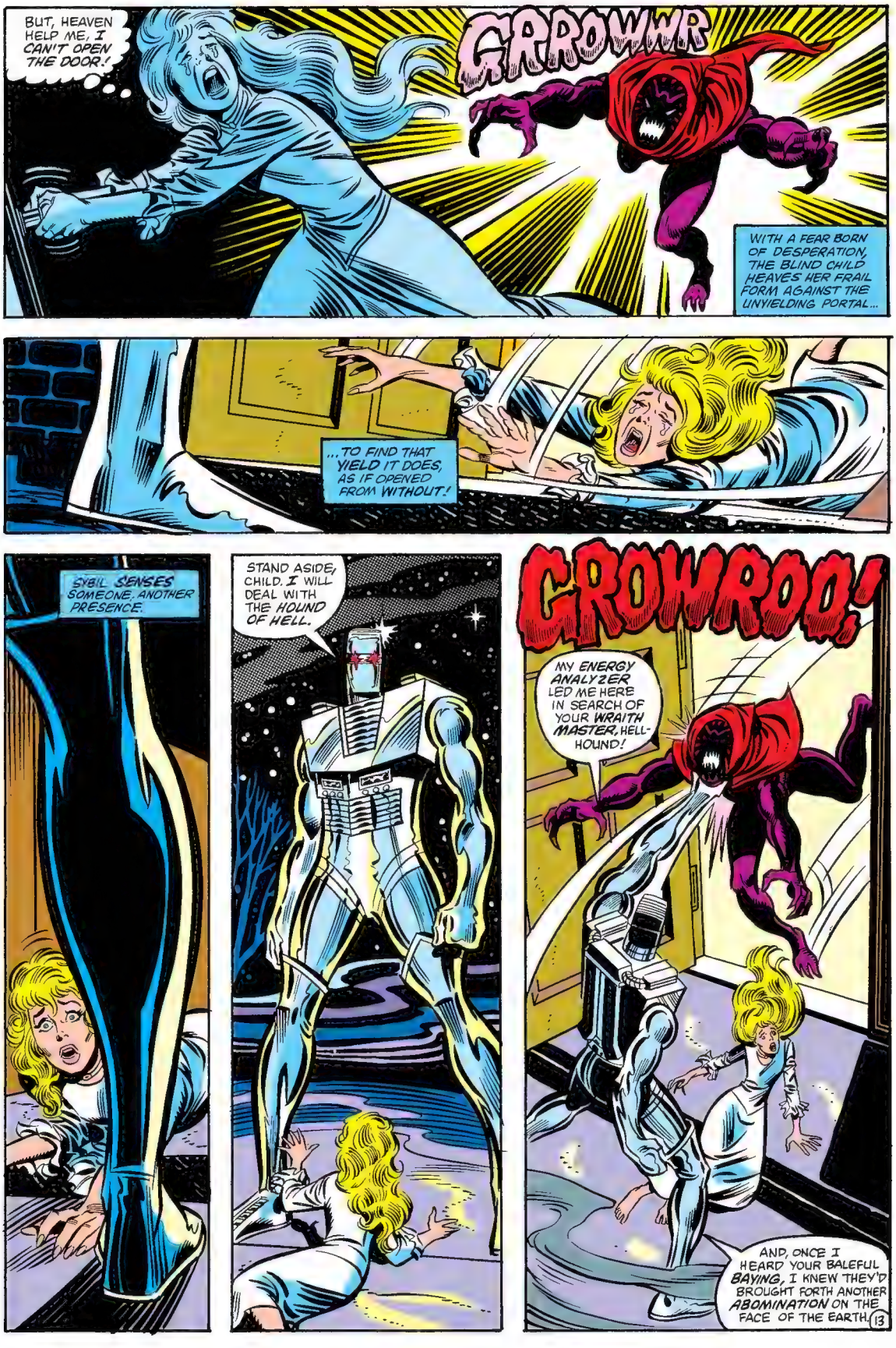

BUT, DESPITE HIS DETERMINATION TO FULFILL HIS MISSION, THE SHINING SILVER SPACEKNIGHT IS STILL A MAN...
... AND, LIKE ALL MEN, PLAGUED WITH DOUBT.
I KNOW THE "WHAT"-- MY PURPOSE FOR BEING HERE. I HAVE NOT YET ANALYZED THE "WHY."
DO I CLEAVE TO MY OATH WITH THIS WORLD-- SELFLESSLY RENOUNCING MY MOST FERVENT DESIRE, TO FIND AND RETURN TO GALADOR--
... OR DO I STAY ON EARTH BECAUSE GALADOR HOLDS NOTHING FOR ME TO RETURN TO?
THE HALF OF MY HUMAN BODY WHICH REMAINED ON GALADOR WAS DESTROYED BY GALACTUS.*
EVEN WERE I TO FIND SOME ROAD LEADING BACK AGAIN TO THE GOLDEN GALAXY--
*ROM #26 --ANN.
--NEVER CAN ROM, SPACEKNIGHT, SHED THIS COLD SPACEKNIGHT STEEL AND RESUME EXISTENCE AS A... MAN!
NEVER CAN I HOLD BRANDY CLARK IN HUMAN ARMS AND PRESS HER, HEART AGAINST BEATING HEART, TO MY WARM HUMAN BREAST.
NEVER CAN I, MORE MACHINE THAN MAN, DARE TO STAND BEFORE HER AND PROFESS MY LOVE!
IS THAT WHY I REMAIN, THEN-- BECAUSE THERE IS NOTHING FOR A COLD CYBORG COMBAT MACHINE TO DO BUT CARRY ON THIS ENDLESS WAR AGAINST THE DIRE WRAITHS?
'TIS NOT A MOTIVE I AM PROUD TO ADMIT--
-- BUT IF SUCH IS MY FATE THEN SO BE IT!
HIS ENERGY ANALYZER ON WIDE-BEAM, ROM SEARCHES FOR HIS FOE, SEEKING SURCEASE FROM SORROW IN THE CLASH OF ARMS.
AHEAD, AN EERIE FOG CLOSES IN AROUND CLIFF HOUSE.
8

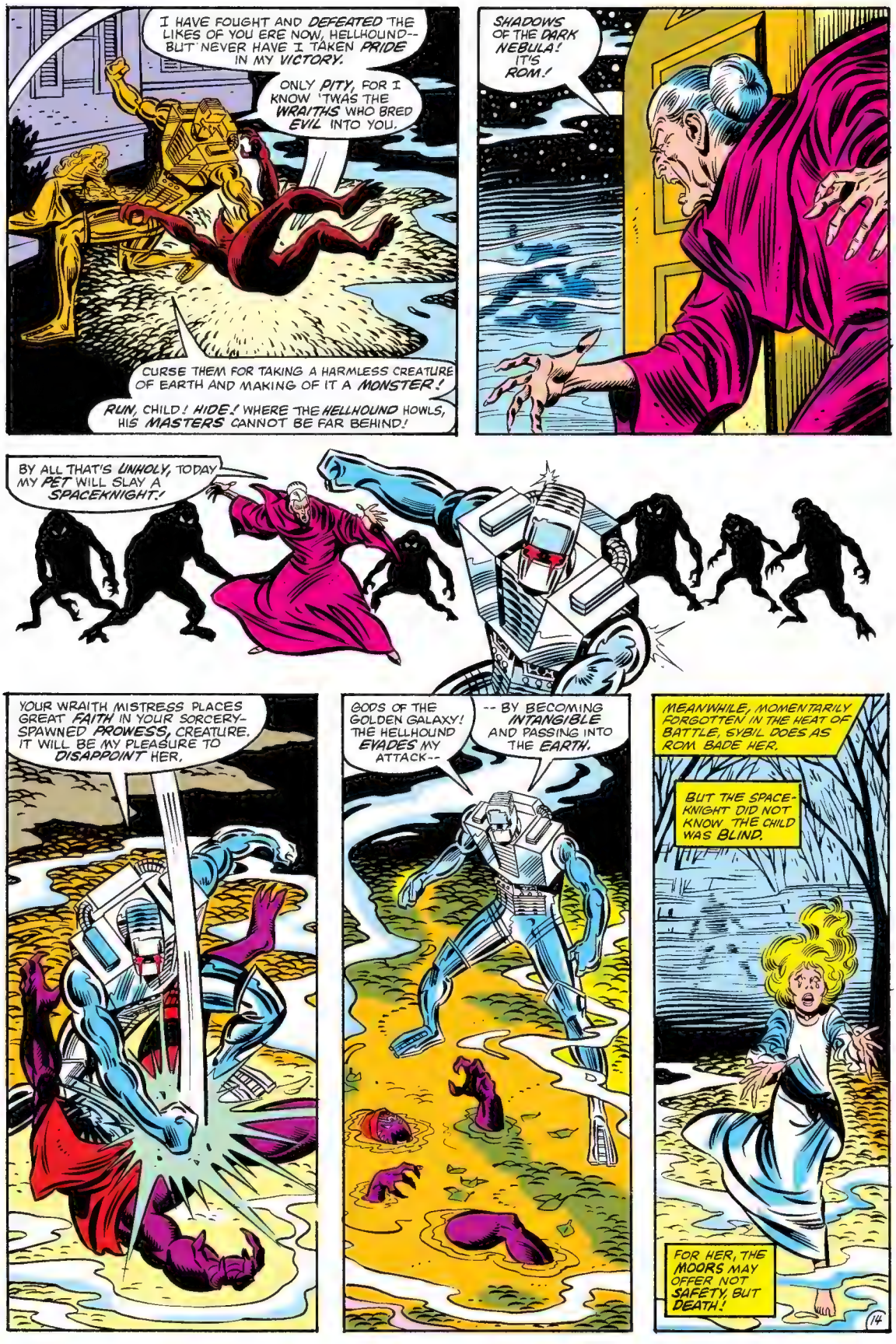
DEEP AND DANK AND DARK AS DEATH, THE FOG EMBRACES THE OLD HOUSE ON THE HILL IN A BONE-PENETRATING COLD.
WITHIN THE NURSERY--THE ROOM SHE HAS OCCUPIED EVER SINCE SHE WAS A BABY--THE GIRL-CHILD SYBIL SHARES HER SORROWS WITH HER OLDEST... AND ONLY... FRIENDS.
YOU REMEMBER MOMMY AND DADDY, DON'T YOU? OF COURSE YOU DO.
THERE WAS SO MUCH LAUGHTER WHEN THEY WERE HERE--
--SO MUCH LIGHT.
HERS HAD BEEN A WONDERFUL CHILDHOOD, SO FULL OF COLOR, SO FULL OF LIFE.
HERE'S MY LITTLE PRINCESS!
MOMMY! DADDY!
RUN TO MY ARMS, MY HAPPY GIRL!
SYBIL COULD SEE THEN. SHE WASN'T BLIND.
NO, THE DARKNESS CAME LATER, WITH AUNT MARA...
...WHEN SHE TOLD THE HYSTERICAL CHILD THAT HER PARENTS WERE GONE, NEVER TO RETURN.
THE DOCTORS AUNT MARA BROUGHT SAID IT WAS THE SHOCK THAT TOOK MY EYESIGHT.
WHY DID MOMMY AND DADDY LEAVE ME HERE, IN THE DARK, IN THE COLD?
IF THEY STILL LOVE ME, WHY DON'T THEY COME BACK?
CARRIED ON LEATHERN WINGS, SINISTER SCREAMING SHAPES PILOT UNERRINGLY THROUGH THE GATHERING GLOOM...
...TO CONVERGE ON CLIFF HOUSE.
9

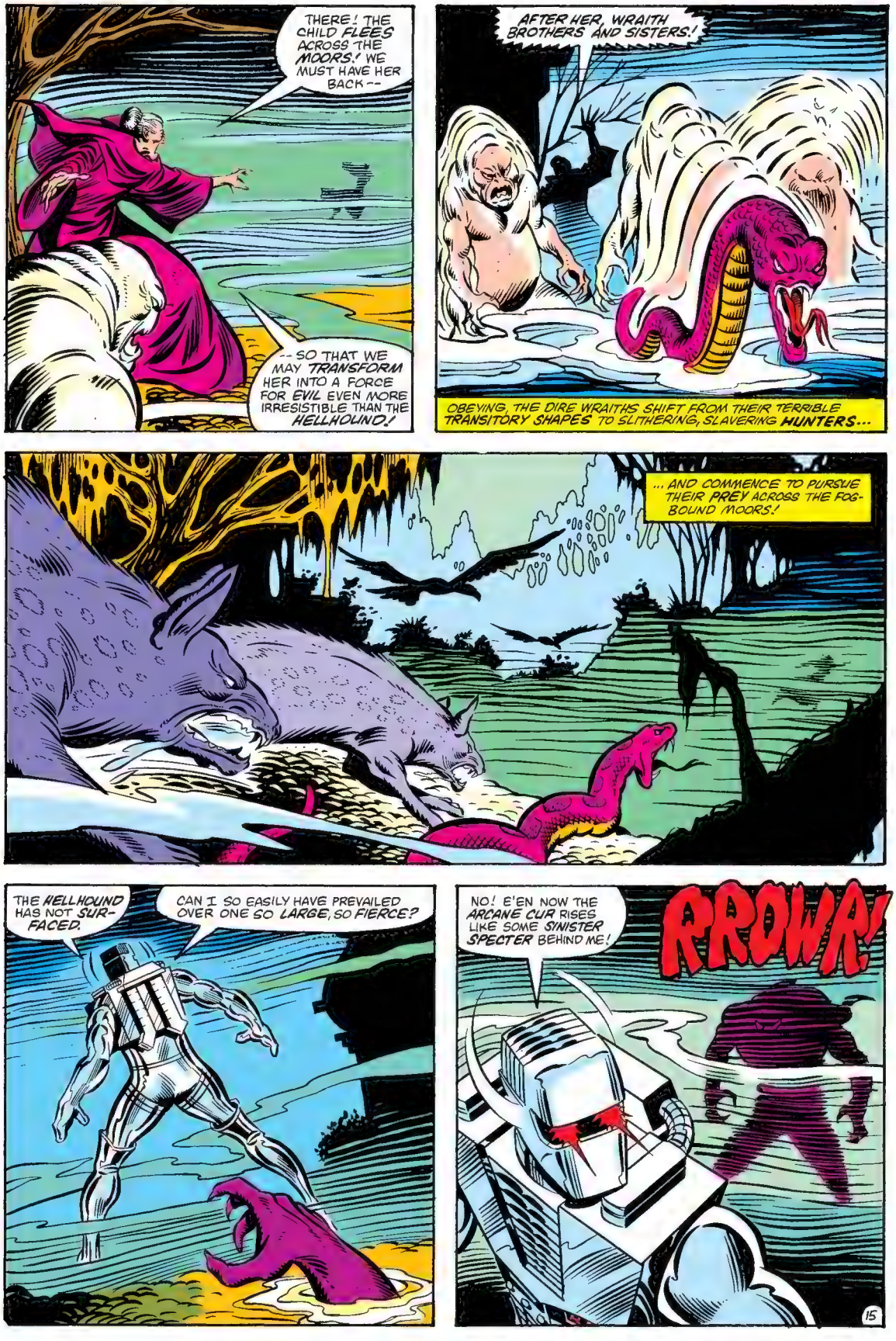

WELCOME, BROTHERS AND SISTERS.
GREETINGS, MARA.
ENTER. THOUGH THE FOG HAS HIDDEN YOUR ARRIVAL, IT IS SAID THE STARS HAVE EYES.
IF SO, THE STARS ARE ALL WE EVER NEED FEAR, FOR ALL HUMAN SIGHT HAS BEEN EXTINGUISHED HERE AT CLIFF HOUSE.
OUR DIRE WRAITH SORCERY HAS SEEN TO THAT.'
ON THE BALUSTRADE, SYBIL HAS BEEN DRAWN FROM THE NURSERY BY THE SOUND OF VOICES BELOW.
GUESTS?
AUNT MARA NEVER HAS GUESTS!
I WONDER WHO THEY ARE?
IT'S BEEN SO LONG SINCE I'VE HEARD ANY VOICE SAVE AUNT MARA'S!
I MUST LISTEN!
CURIOSITY, THEY SAY, ONCE KILLED THE CAT.
TONIGHT, IT SLAYS ALL FAITH A YOUNG BLIND GIRL HAS EVER KNOWN.
10

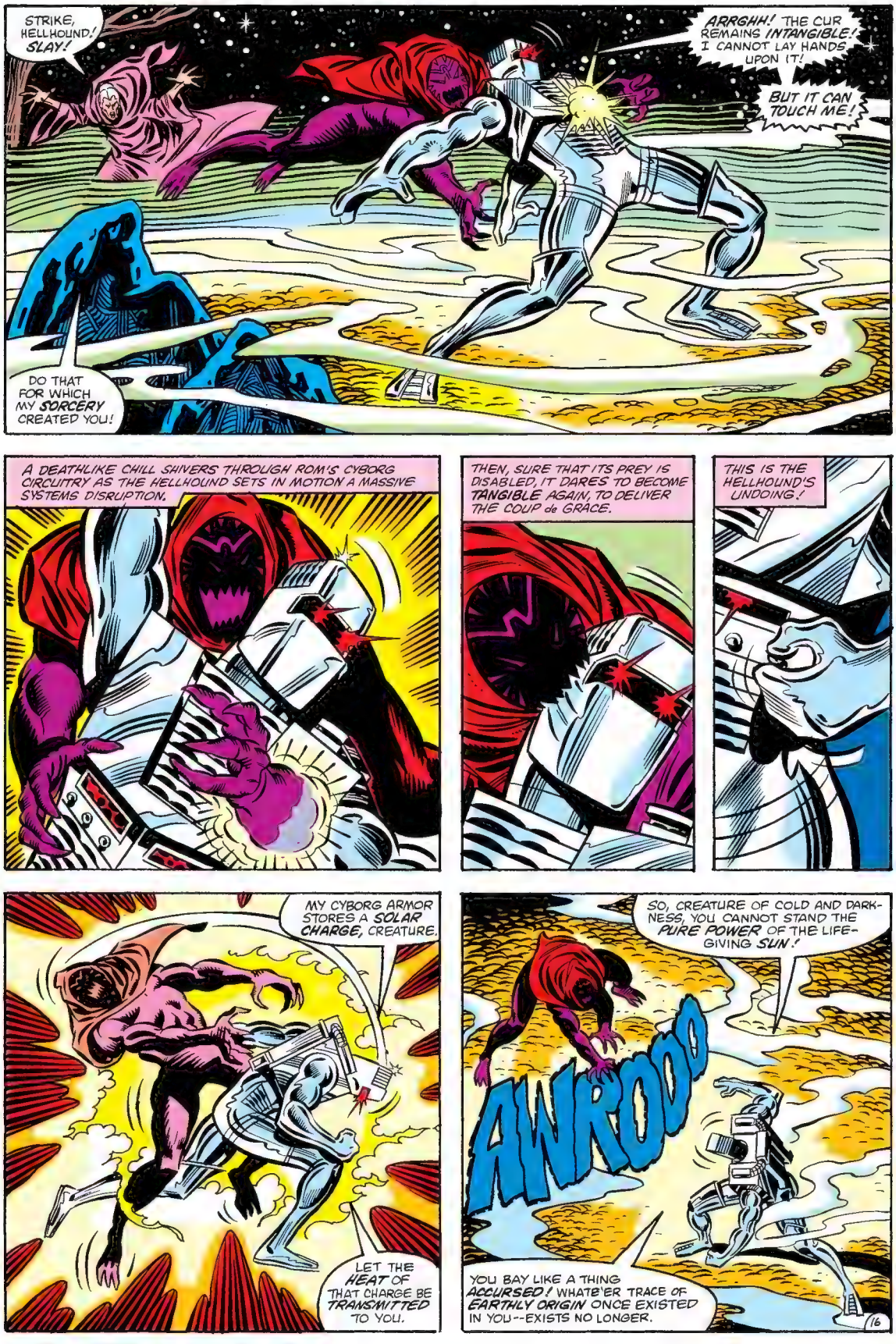

IT HAS BEEN YEARS SINCE WE SLEW THE MASTER AND MISTRESS AND BEGAN TO USE CLIFF HOUSE AS A BASE FOR INFILTRATING THE SURROUNDING AREA...
...AND YET WE HAVE LET THEIR CHILD LIVE, MARA! WHY?
BECAUSE, YOUNG AND VULNERABLE, SHE IS PERFECTLY SUITED TO OUR LARGER PURPOSE!
WHAT IS OUR PURPOSE, MARA?
SEE YOU NOT THIS DOG? CONQUISTADOR WAS BUT AN INSIGNIFICANT EARTH PUPPY BEFORE OUR WRAITH SCIENCE AND SORCERY TRANSFORMED HIM INTO A SAVAGE, SLAVERING HELLHOUND--
--A TELEPATHIC TRACKER, FIERCE AND UNCANNY, AND TOTALLY SUBSERVIANT TO HIS DIRE WRAITH MASTERS.!
THUS FAR, WE HAVE ONLY TRANSFORMED ANIMALS! I WOULD LIKE TO SEE IF OUR ARCANE ARTS WILL WORK ON A HUMAN!
THE CHILD!
MY PARENTS NEVER SAILED AWAY AND LEFT ME! THEY WERE MURDERED BY AUNT MARA AND HER GUESTS!
AND WHATEVER HORRIBLE THING THEY DID TO MY DOG, CONQUISTADOR... THEY NOW INTEND TO DO TO ME!
IN A HAPPIER WORLD, SYBIL WOULD BE ENTITLED TO THE PRIVACY OF HER OWN THOUGHTS.
BUT, AS MARA SAID, THE HELLHOUND IS A TELEPATHIC TRACKER...
GRRRR
...AND HE'S "SCENTED" THE CHILD'S ROILING THOUGHT-PATTERNS!
I'VE GOT TO RUN! GOT TO GET AWAY!
IN A PANIC, THE BLIND CHILD TURNS TO FLEE...
OH!
...THUS GIVING AWAY HER PRESENCE.
SKRASH!


WHAT WAS THAT, MARA?
THE HELLHOUND HAS SENSED SOMEONE IN THE HALLWAY!
GO, CONQUISTADOR!
AWROOO
ONCE A DOG...
...A DOG NO LONGER.
CONQUISTADOR IS A HELLHOUND.
A SHAPE-SHIFTER LIKE HIS WRAITH MASTERS...
...HE LEAPS FORTH AT AUNT MARA'S COMMAND.
HE HAS BECOME AN UNEARTHLY, ARCANE CUR TO WHOM NO BARRIER IS INSUPERABLE...
...NOT EVEN SOLID OAK DOORS!
GRRRR
CONQUISTADOR! AUNT MARA'S SENT HIM AFTER ME!
I'VE GOT TO GET AWAY-- REACH THE CLIFFS!
I'D RATHER DIE THAN LET AUNT MARA DO SOMETHING AWFUL TO ME!
12

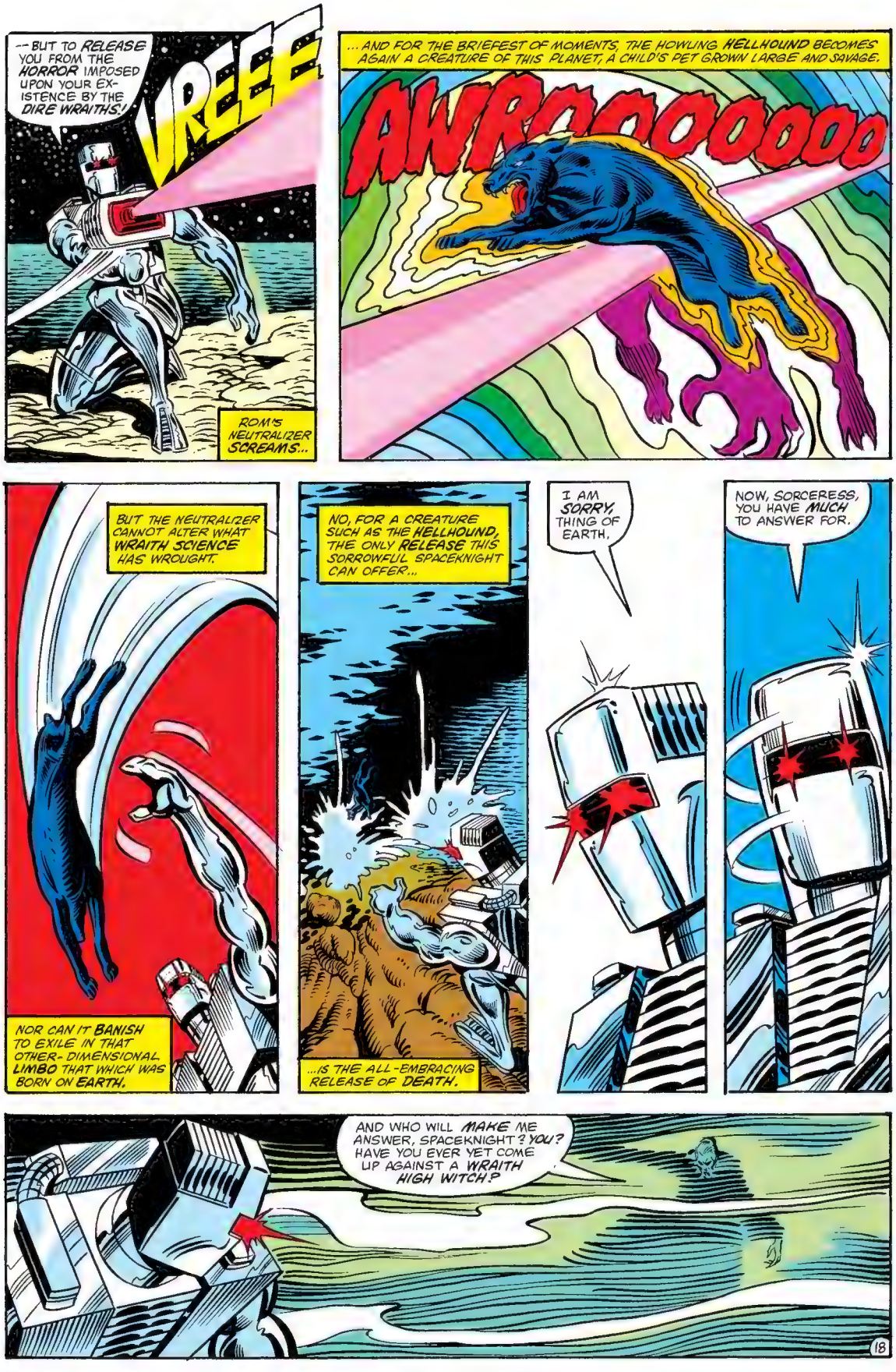

BUT, HEAVEN HELP ME, I CAN'T OPEN THE DOOR!
GRROWWR
WITH A FEAR BORN OF DESPERATION, THE BLIND CHILD HEAVES HER FRAIL FORM AGAINST THE UNYIELDING PORTAL...
...TO FIND THAT YIELD IT DOES, AS IF OPENED FROM WITHOUT!
SYBIL SENSES SOMEONE, ANOTHER PRESENCE.
STAND ASIDE, CHILD. I WILL DEAL WITH THE HOUND OF HELL.
GROWROO!
MY ENERGY ANALYZER LED ME HERE IN SEARCH OF YOUR WRAITH MASTER, HELL-HOUND!
AND, ONCE I HEARD YOUR BALEFUL BAYING, I KNEW THEY'D BROUGHT FORTH ANOTHER ABOMINATION ON THE FACE OF THE EARTH.
13

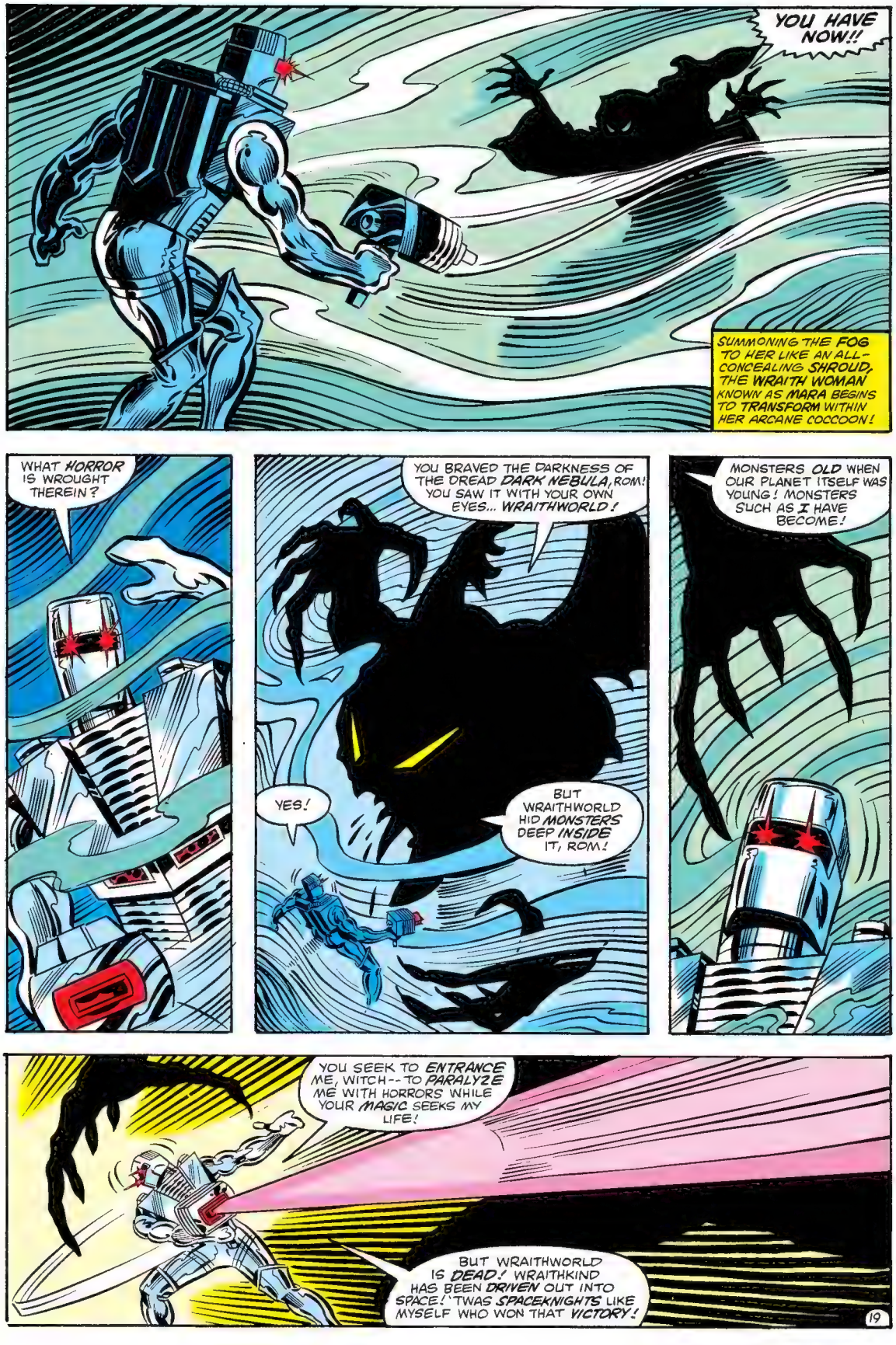

I HAVE FOUGHT AND DEFEATED THE LIKES OF YOU ERE NOW, HELLHOUND-- BUT NEVER HAVE I TAKEN PRIDE IN MY VICTORY.
ONLY PITY, FOR I KNOW 'TWAS THE WRAITHS WHO BRED EVIL INTO YOU.
CURSE THEM FOR TAKING A HARMLESS CREATURE OF EARTH AND MAKING OF IT A MONSTER!
RUN, CHILD! HIDE! WHERE THE HELLHOUND HOWLS, HIS MASTERS CANNOT BE FAR BEHIND!
SHADOWS OF THE DARK NEBULA! IT'S ROM!
BY ALL THAT'S UNHOLY, TODAY MY PET WILL SLAY A SPACEKNIGHT!
YOUR WRAITH MISTRESS PLACES GREAT FAITH IN YOUR SORCERY-SPAWNED PROWESS, CREATURE. IT WILL BE MY PLEASURE TO DISAPPOINT HER.
GODS OF THE GOLDEN GALAXY! THE HELLHOUND EVADES MY ATTACK--
-- BY BECOMING INTANGIBLE AND PASSING INTO THE EARTH.
MEANWHILE, MOMENTARILY FORGOTTEN IN THE HEAT OF BATTLE, SYBIL DOES AS ROM BADE HER.
BUT THE SPACE-KNIGHT DID NOT KNOW THE CHILD WAS BLIND.
FOR HER, THE MOORS MAY OFFER NOT SAFETY, BUT DEATH!
14

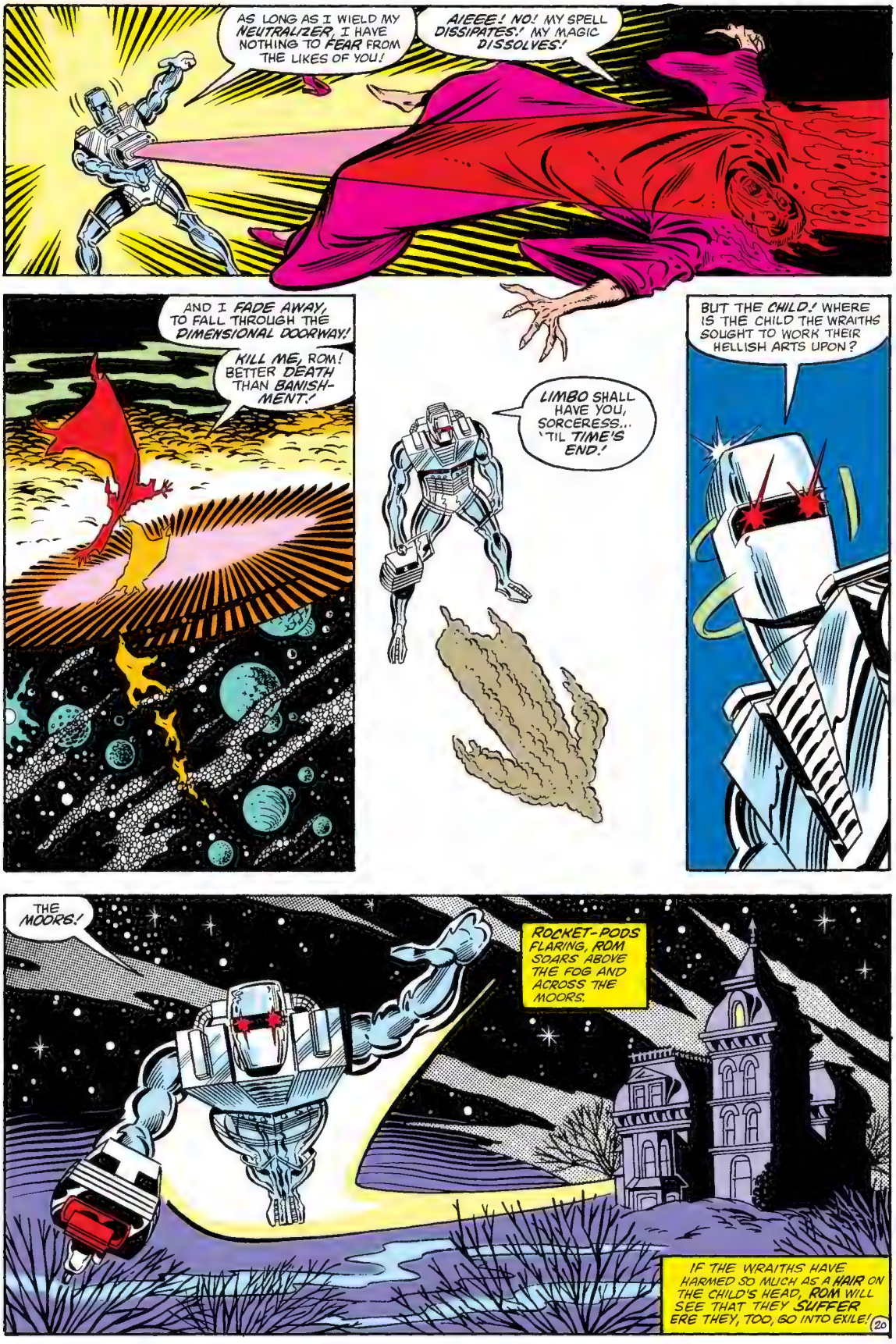

THERE! THE CHILD FLEES ACROSS THE MOORS! WE MUST HAVE HER BACK--
-- SO THAT WE MAY TRANSFORM HER INTO A FORCE FOR EVIL EVEN MORE IRRESISTIBLE THAN THE HELLHOUND!
AFTER HER, WRAITH BROTHERS AND SISTERS!
OBEYING, THE DIRE WRAITHS SHIFT FROM THEIR TERRIBLE TRANSITORY SHAPES TO SLITHERING, SLAVERING HUNTERS...
... AND COMMENCE TO PURSUE THEIR PREY ACROSS THE FOG-BOUND MOORS!
THE HELLHOUND HAS NOT SURFACED.
CAN I SO EASILY HAVE PREVAILED OVER ONE SO LARGE, SO FIERCE?
NO! E'EN NOW THE ARCANE CUR RISES LIKE SOME SINISTER SPECTER BEHIND ME!
RROWR!
15

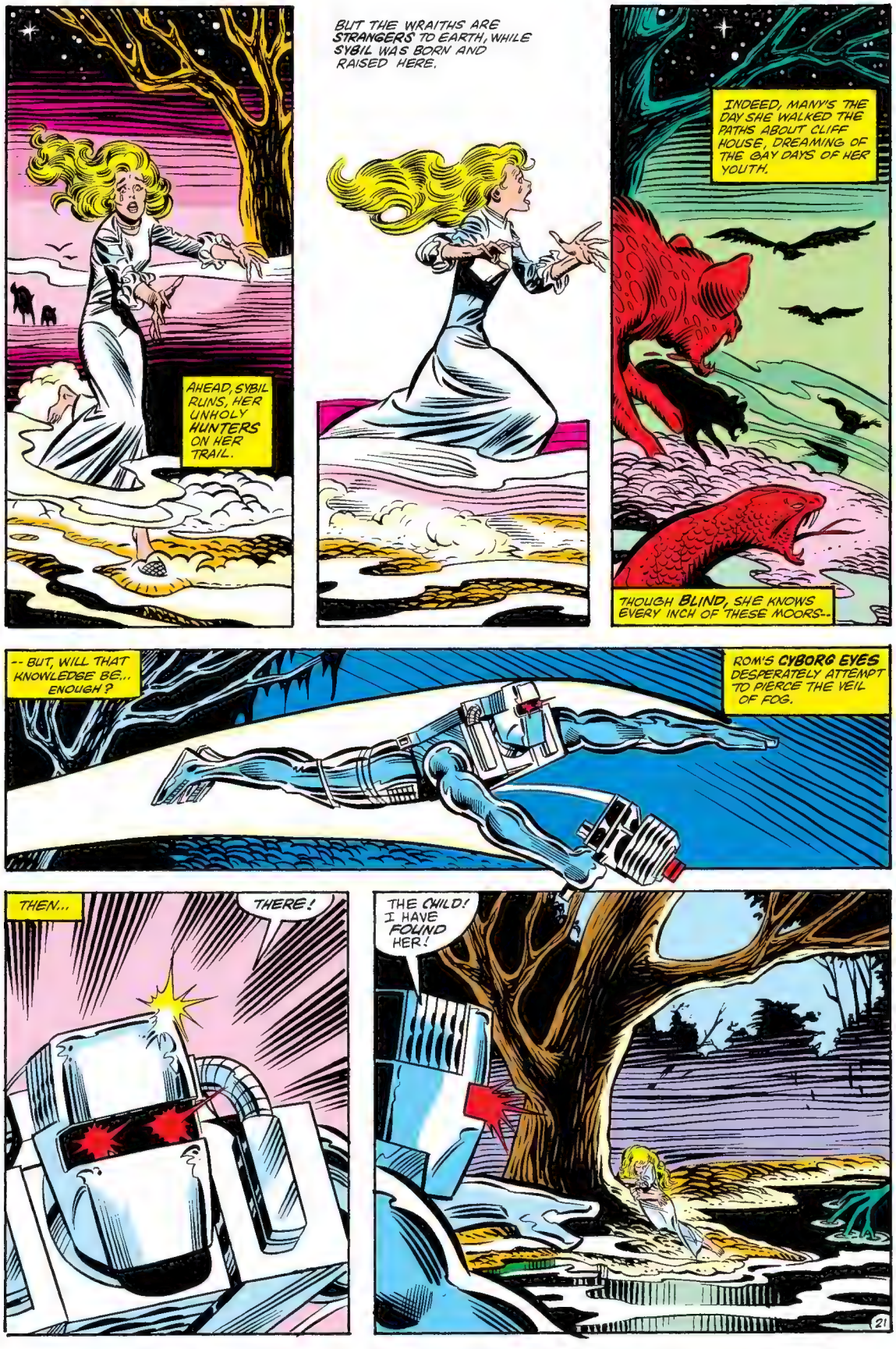

STRIKE, HELLHOUND! SLAY!
ARRGHH! THE CUR REMAINS INTANGIBLE! I CANNOT LAY HANDS UPON IT!
BUT IT CAN TOUCH ME!
DO THAT FOR WHICH MY SORCERY CREATED YOU!
A DEATHLIKE CHILL SHIVERS THROUGH ROM'S CYBORG CIRCUITRY AS THE HELLHOUND SETS IN MOTION A MASSIVE SYSTEMS DISRUPTION.
THEN, SURE THAT ITS PREY IS DISABLED, IT DARES TO BECOME TANGIBLE AGAIN, TO DELIVER THE COUP de GRACE.
THIS IS THE HELLHOUND'S UNDOING!
MY CYBORG ARMOR STORES A SOLAR CHARGE, CREATURE.
LET THE HEAT OF THAT CHARGE BE TRANSMITTED TO YOU.
SO, CREATURE OF COLD AND DARKNESS, YOU CANNOT STAND THE PURE POWER OF THE LIFE-GIVING SUN!
AWROOO
YOU BAY LIKE A THING ACCURSED! WHATE'ER TRACE OF EARTHLY ORIGIN ONCE EXISTED IN YOU--EXISTS NO LONGER.
16

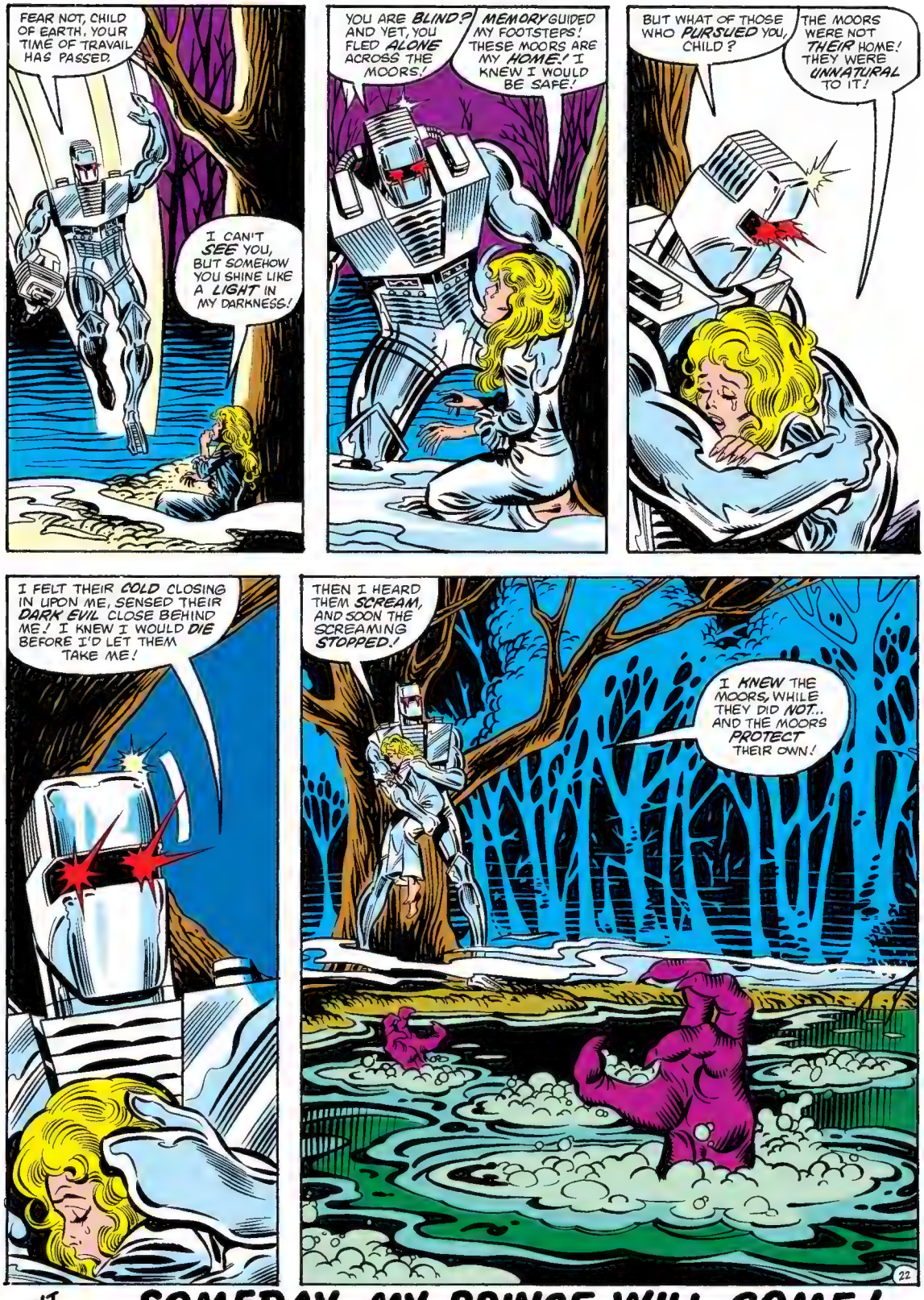
NO, SPACEKNIGHT! WHATEVER GENTLENESS, LOVE AND LOYALTY EXISTED IN THE EARTH PUP WAS BEWITCHED OUT OF HIM BY WRAITH SORCERY--
--OR CARVED OUT OF HIM BY WRAITH SCIENCE!
AND, AS SOON AS WE FINISH WITH YOU, THE SAME SHALL BE DONE TO THE CHILD!
WRAITH WITCH! NEVER SHALL I ALLOW HARM TO COME TO THE CHILD OF EARTH!
I AM SWORN TO SAFEGUARD SUCH AS SHE--
--AND I SHALL BE TRUE TO MY MISSION THOUGH YOU AND ALL YOUR HOUNDS OF HELL SEEK TO BAR MY PATH!
SKRAK!
BUT I SENSE THAT THE LONGER I TARRY WITH YOUR CUR, THE GRAVER THE DANGER BECOMES TO THE GIRL. 'TIS TIME TO SET ASIDE PITY FOR THE POOR, TRANSFORMED ANIMAL I FIGHT--
--AND SUMMON FROM SUBSPACE... MY NEUTRALIZER!
EVEN AS GALADOR'S GREATEST WEAPON APPEARS IN THE SPACEKNIGHT'S OUTSTRETCHED HAND...
...THE HELLHOUND LEAPS!
WOULD THAT YOU UNDERSTOOD, CREATURE, THAT I DO WHAT I DO NOT OUT OF MALICE OR HATE--
17


--BUT TO RELEASE YOU FROM THE HORROR IMPOSED UPON YOUR EXISTENCE BY THE DIRE WRAITHS!
VREEE
ROM'S NEUTRALIZER SCREAMS...
...AND FOR THE BRIEFEST OF MOMENTS, THE HOWLING HELLHOUND BECOMES AGAIN A CREATURE OF THIS PLANET, A CHILD'S PET GROWN LARGE AND SAVAGE.
AWRoooooo
BUT THE NEUTRALIZER CANNOT ALTER WHAT WRAITH SCIENCE HAS WROUGHT.
NOR CAN IT BANISH TO EXILE IN THAT OTHER-DIMENSIONAL LIMBO THAT WHICH WAS BORN ON EARTH.
NO, FOR A CREATURE SUCH AS THE HELLHOUND, THE ONLY RELEASE THIS SORROWFUL SPACEKNIGHT CAN OFFER...
...IS THE ALL-EMBRACING RELEASE OF DEATH.
I AM SORRY, THING OF EARTH,
NOW, SORCERESS, YOU HAVE MUCH TO ANSWER FOR.
AND WHO WILL MAKE ME ANSWER, SPACEKNIGHT? YOU? HAVE YOU EVER YET COME UP AGAINST A WRAITH HIGH WITCH?
18


YOU HAVE NOW!!
SUMMONING THE FOG TO HER LIKE AN ALL-CONCEALING SHROUD, THE WRAITH WOMAN KNOWN AS MARA BEGINS TO TRANSFORM WITHIN HER ARCANE COCCOON!
WHAT HORROR IS WROUGHT THEREIN?
YOU BRAVED THE DARKNESS OF THE DREAD DARK NEBULA, ROM! YOU SAW IT WITH YOUR OWN EYES... WRAITHWORLD!
YES!
BUT WRAITHWORLD HID MONSTERS DEEP INSIDE IT, ROM!
MONSTERS OLD WHEN OUR PLANET ITSELF WAS YOUNG! MONSTERS SUCH AS I HAVE BECOME!
YOU SEEK TO ENTRANCE ME, WITCH-- TO PARALYZE ME WITH HORRORS WHILE YOUR MAGIC SEEKS MY LIFE!
BUT WRAITHWORLD IS DEAD! WRAITHKIND HAS BEEN DRIVEN OUT INTO SPACE! 'TWAS SPACEKNIGHTS LIKE MYSELF WHO WON THAT VICTORY!
19


AS LONG AS I WIELD MY NEUTRALIZER, I HAVE NOTHING TO FEAR FROM THE LIKES OF YOU!
AIEEE! NO! MY SPELL DISSIPATES! MY MAGIC DISSOLVES!
AND I FADE AWAY, TO FALL THROUGH THE DIMENSIONAL DOORWAY!
KILL ME, ROM! BETTER DEATH THAN BANISHMENT!
LIMBO SHALL HAVE YOU, SORCERESS... 'TIL TIME'S END!
BUT THE CHILD! WHERE IS THE CHILD THE WRAITHS SOUGHT TO WORK THEIR HELLISH ARTS UPON?
THE MOORS!
ROCKET-PODS FLARING, ROM SOARS ABOVE THE FOG AND ACROSS THE MOORS.
IF THE WRAITHS HAVE HARMED SO MUCH AS A HAIR ON THE CHILD'S HEAD, ROM WILL SEE THAT THEY SUFFER ERE THEY, TOO, GO INTO EXILE!
20


AHEAD, SYBIL RUNS, HER UNHOLY HUNTERS ON HER TRAIL.
BUT THE WRAITHS ARE STRANGERS TO EARTH, WHILE SYBIL WAS BORN AND RAISED HERE.
INDEED, MANY'S THE DAY SHE WALKED THE PATHS ABOUT CLIFF HOUSE, DREAMING OF THE GAY DAYS OF HER YOUTH.
THOUGH BLIND, SHE KNOWS EVERY INCH OF THESE MOORS--
-- BUT, WILL THAT KNOWLEDGE BE... ENOUGH?
ROM'S CYBORG EYES DESPERATELY ATTEMPT TO PIERCE THE VEIL OF FOG.
THEN...
THERE!
THE CHILD! I HAVE FOUND HER!
21


FEAR NOT, CHILD OF EARTH, YOUR TIME OF TRAVAIL HAS PASSED.
I CAN'T SEE YOU, BUT SOMEHOW YOU SHINE LIKE A LIGHT IN MY DARKNESS!
YOU ARE BLIND? AND YET, YOU FLED ALONE ACROSS THE MOORS!
MEMORY GUIDED MY FOOTSTEPS! THESE MOORS ARE MY HOME! I KNEW I WOULD BE SAFE!
BUT WHAT OF THOSE WHO PURSUED YOU, CHILD?
THE MOORS WERE NOT THEIR HOME! THEY WERE UNNATURAL TO IT!
I FELT THEIR COLD CLOSING IN UPON ME, SENSED THEIR DARK EVIL CLOSE BEHIND ME! I KNEW I WOULD DIE BEFORE I'D LET THEM TAKE ME!
THEN I HEARD THEM SCREAM, AND SOON THE SCREAMING STOPPED!
I KNEW THE MOORS, WHILE THEY DID NOT.. AND THE MOORS PROTECT THEIR OWN!
22

NEXT MONTH:

SOMEDAY, MY PRINCE WILL COME!

ENTER: the **SUB-MARINER.**

ROM AND THE X-MEN: MARVEL TALES (FEBRUARY 2024) COLLECTED ***ROM #17-18*** AND ***#31-32.***
COVER BY NICK BRADSHAW & RICHARD ISANOVE

Galador! Glorious Galador, homeworld of our pulsating protagonist for this very special edition of *Marvel Tales*. His name: Rom, which, if you're not in the know, is an acronym for "read only memory." Got that? Okay. Originally, our gallant Galadorian was a terrific toy created for Parker Brothers (later sold to Hasbro). Mighty Marvel acquired the literary license in 1979 and published *Rom* on a monthly basis from December 1979 through February 1986. That's 75 wildly successful issues in addition to four annuals! And it's quite a sales record for a comic book in a medium that hasn't always been kind to toy tie-ins. Way to go, Rom!

Before we delve into the scintillating stories reprinted herein, a little bit of cosmic history is in order. The planet Galador's most advanced life-forms are basically bipedal beings, quite human in appearance. They are a noble race, proud of their stellar heritage. While it existed peacefully for many centuries, there came a time in the not-so-distant past when Galador came under merciless assault by the fearsome, deadly Dire Wraiths of Wraithworld. Their ghastly goal was no less than universal conquest, and Galador was top of the list. The Galadorian ruler known as the Prime Director asked for volunteers to abandon their flesh-and-blood bodies and have their mentality transferred into gleaming cyborg forms, whence they would be known as — Spaceknights! The redoubtable Rom was, naturally, the first to offer his inestimable services. Under attack from an awesome army of cyborg Spaceknights, the Dire Wraiths abandoned their assault on Galador. However, using their mastery of sorcery and guile, the Wraiths were able to deceive Rom, trick him into allowing their escape. Whereupon they abandoned their home planet and scattered through space, with some making landfall on our beleaguered mudball, Earth, in the 1940s. Using their power of physical imitation, the loathsome invaders infiltrated our society in human form to plot strategy for further conquest. Because Rom had inadvertently facilitated their escape, he vowed not to regain his human form until the shape-shifting enemy was totally crushed. Thus began the saga of the Spaceknight Rom on Earth.

And that brings us to the quartet of classics you're soon to savor in this cataclysmic collection, o favored ones. *Rom #17–18* is a stirring two-part tale from 1981 guest-starring the merry mutants, who had taken over comicdom — the Uncanny X-Men! However, these were not Charles Xavier's original quintet of students from his School for Gifted Youngsters. These were the international X-Men from the mid-1970s, with a mutant membership from across the globe. *Rom* writer Bill Mantlo, who had authored the series since its inception, found a way to seamlessly integrate the X-Men into the Rom-centric segment of the Marvel Universe. In the small town of Clairton, our intrepid Spaceknight encounters a creature aptly named Hybrid, who is the awful offspring of a human/Dire Wraith mating! *Euggh!* He's a mutant, and that's enough to draw the X-Men's attention. This was a truly inspired concept by scrivener Mantlo, brilliantly illustrated by potent penciler Sal Buscema, who had graciously lent his virtuoso visuals to *Rom* since issue #1. Bill Mantlo was a top Marvel scripter, no stranger to toy tie-ins, having been the writer on our top-selling *Micronauts* title. Sal Buscema was a longtime Marvel mainstay, having penciled everything from the *Incredible Hulk* to the *New Mutants*. They were quite a team and never more in sync than on this dynamic double-issue extravaganza. Just seeing our pal Sal's amazing interpretation of Wolverine, Storm, Colossus, etc., is worth the price of admission. You True Believers are in for a real treat!

But the wonderment is just beginning as we next present from 1982 another all-star effort by Messrs Mantlo and Buscema. That would be *Rom #31–32*, if you're keeping track. This outing features another group of mutants — but malevolent mutants this time. Enter: the Brotherhood of Evil Mutants, whose mendacious membership includes such heavyweights as the Blob, Avalanche, Pyro, Mystique, Rogue and Destiny. While they're lucky enough to escape the maximum-security prison in Windust, West Virginia, things go terribly awry when they have to go a few rounds with Rom himself and, later, with the re-formed

horror — Hybrid! Yep, he's back to menace human and mutant alike. And he's taken quite a fancy to Rogue for a terrifying reason I will not reveal here. There's so much to recommend in this two-part powerhouse production. Bill and Sal were firing on all cylinders, folks. You'll be left gaping in awe.

It was my distinct privilege to have been the editor on *Rom* for several years during the middle of its storied run. And it's with pardonable pride I mention that during my tenure, we were able to fulfill Bill's most fervent wish for the series: that we finally show the dreaded Dire Wraiths in all their pernicious presence. Apparently, there had been some contractual thing that we not really show the Wraiths. But after appealing to the powers-that-be, that hurdle was overcome and I was able to impose upon mega-talent, and longtime friend, Walter Simonson to come aboard and design the look for our master villains. And that has remained their appearance ever since. I'm only sorry I wasn't able to edit *Rom* until its final 75th issue. I had such a blast on this book. But other duties called, and equally skilled hands came aboard to take my place.

Now Marvel will reprint the entire *Rom* series in the deluxe Omnibus format — it will be well worth the wait, folks. Now, as you digest that bit of news, let's mosey down to the sleepy hamlet of Clairton and see what's happening. Just keep that Neutralizer at the ready. You never know who's human — and who ain't.

Enjoy,

Ralph Macchio

Ralph Macchio

Ralph Macchio *spent over 35 years at Marvel, starting as an assistant editor and later writing* Avengers, Thor *and many others. As editor, he oversaw books across the Marvel line, including shepherding the* Ultimate *line into existence and editing all of Stephen King's Marvel adaptations.*

ROM AND THE X-MEN: MARVEL TALES COVER SKETCH & INKS BY NICK BRADSHAW

YOUR RECORDS SHOWS LESS THAN SINGLE-MINDED DEVOTION TO THE CAUSE, COMMANDER! YOU'VE EVEN AIDED AND ADVANCED THIS PLANET'S TECHNOLOGY!
TH-THEY'RE TALKING LIKE MIKE IS FROM OUTER SPACE OR SOMETHING!
A SPY! WHAT HAVE YOU HEARD, WITCH?
OHHH! NOTHING-- I HEARD NOTHING! PLEASE, LET ME GO!
SECONDS LATER...
LOOK WHAT I FOUND SNOOPING OUTSIDE!
LAURA!
MIKE! SAY IT'S NOT TRUE! TELL ME YOU AREN'T SOME ALIEN INVADER!
I... I...
HEAVEN HELP ME, LAURA--I AM!
CALLING ON HEAVEN, COMMANDER?
BY THE WRAITH LORDS! HE'S FURTHER GONE THAN WE SUSPECTED!
PERHAPS HE'LL YET HAVE A CHANCE TO PROVE HIMSELF!
I LIVED WITH YOU FOR FIVE YEARS-- AND NEVER EVEN SUSPECTED? I FEEL SO STUPID!
AND SO-- SO VIOLATED!
DON'T SAY THAT, LAURA!
12

ROM #25, PAGE 33 ART BY GREG LaROCQUE & STEVE MITCHELL
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ROM #30 COVER ART BY AL MILGROM & STEVE MITCHELL
COURTESY OF HERITAGEAUCTIONS.COM

ROM 30
I AM ROM, SPACEKNIGHT, AND I AM FODDER FOR NO FOUL CREATURE. UNNGH!
BRAVE WORDS...
CLINK
WHILE, WATCHING FROM ABOVE...
THE EARTHLINGS ARE MORE ADVANCED THAN I HAD IMAGINED!
THAT EARTH-FORGED ARMOR RESISTS MY DEVOURING PETS!
HAH! THE EARTHLINGS MAY HAVE ENGINEERED THE MEANS OF THEIR OWN DESTRUCTION!
I COMMAND ALL FORMS OF METAL! IF INDEED I CAN-TAKE CONTROL OF THEIR INVINCIBLE BATTLE-ARMOR, I CAN TURN THEIR OWN WEAPONS BACK AGAINST THEM!
NO INVASION NEED EVER BE SIGNALLED! NO ASTRAN NEED EVER ENTER THE BATTLE!
I WILL CONQUER EARTH SINGLE-HANDEDLY, AND BE PROCLAIMED MY PLANET'S GREATEST HERO!
AND, BELOW...
SQUEE
SHROOM!
SHHSSSS
ARRHH!
I KNOW NOT WHICH IS WORSE--YOUR FETID TOUCH, OR WHATEVER FOUL PURPOSE LIES BEHIND IT!
16
INKER: MAKE SPIDERS METALLIC, TAKE OUT HAIR

ROM #30, PAGE 16 ART BY SAL BUSCEMA & JOE SINNOTT
COURTESY OF HERITAGEAUCTIONS.COM

WITHOUT ANOTHER WORD, ROM FLIES OFF TO FACE THE FOE, LEAVING ROGUE FEELING THAT SHE HAS SOMEHOW BEEN... FORGIVEN.
AN' THAT'S THE HERO WE'RE TRYIN' TO KILL?!
ONCE THE BATTLE IS JOINED, ROM WILL TRIUMPH.
THEN THERE IS NO REASON FOR US TO TARRY HERE!
IS THAT TRUE, DESTINY?
NO. OUR PRESENCE IS REQUIRED TO INSURE VICTORY.
DESTINY'S CRYPTIC REMARKS DO NOT REACH ROM'S AUDIO-RECEPTORS THROUGH THE BLIZZARD THAT RAGES ABOUT HYBRID. NOT KNOWING HE WILL WIN, ROM BATTLES AS THOUGH HE HAS EVERYTHING TO LOSE.
FOUL, FETID ABOMINATION, IS THERE NOTHING YOU WOULD NOT SULLY WITH YOUR TOUCH?
YOU SPEAK OF THE CHILD--ROGUE?
I LIKE HER, ROM! I WANT HER! HER POWER COUPLED WITH MINE WILL BRING FORTH A RACE INVINCIBLE!
YOU SHALL NEVER HAVE HER, HORROR!
SANCTIMONIOUS SPACEKNIGHT! YOUR OUTRAGE MASKS YOUR TRUE DESIRES!
YOU WANT ROGUE, TOO!
AFTER ALL, ROM--YOU ARE A MAN!
THE HORROR TRANSFORMS HIMSELF INTO... MYSELF!
BUT THAT ASPECT OF MY BEING -- THE HUMAN ROM -- NO LONGER EXISTS. IT WAS DESTROYED BY GALACTUS ALONG WITH THE SPACEKNIGHT TERMINATOR.*
TORTURE ME NOT WITH THINGS THAT MAY NEVER BE AGAIN, HORROR!
*ROM #26 -- ANN.
VERY WELL, ROM--I SHALL TORTURE YOU INSTEAD WITH TEMPTATIONS OF THE FLESH!
FIEND, YOU INVADE MY MEMORY-CIRCUITS--
--TO CONJURE FORTH THE IMAGE OF BRANDY CLARK!
18

ROM #32, PAGE 18 ART BY SAL BUSCEMA & JOE SINNOTT
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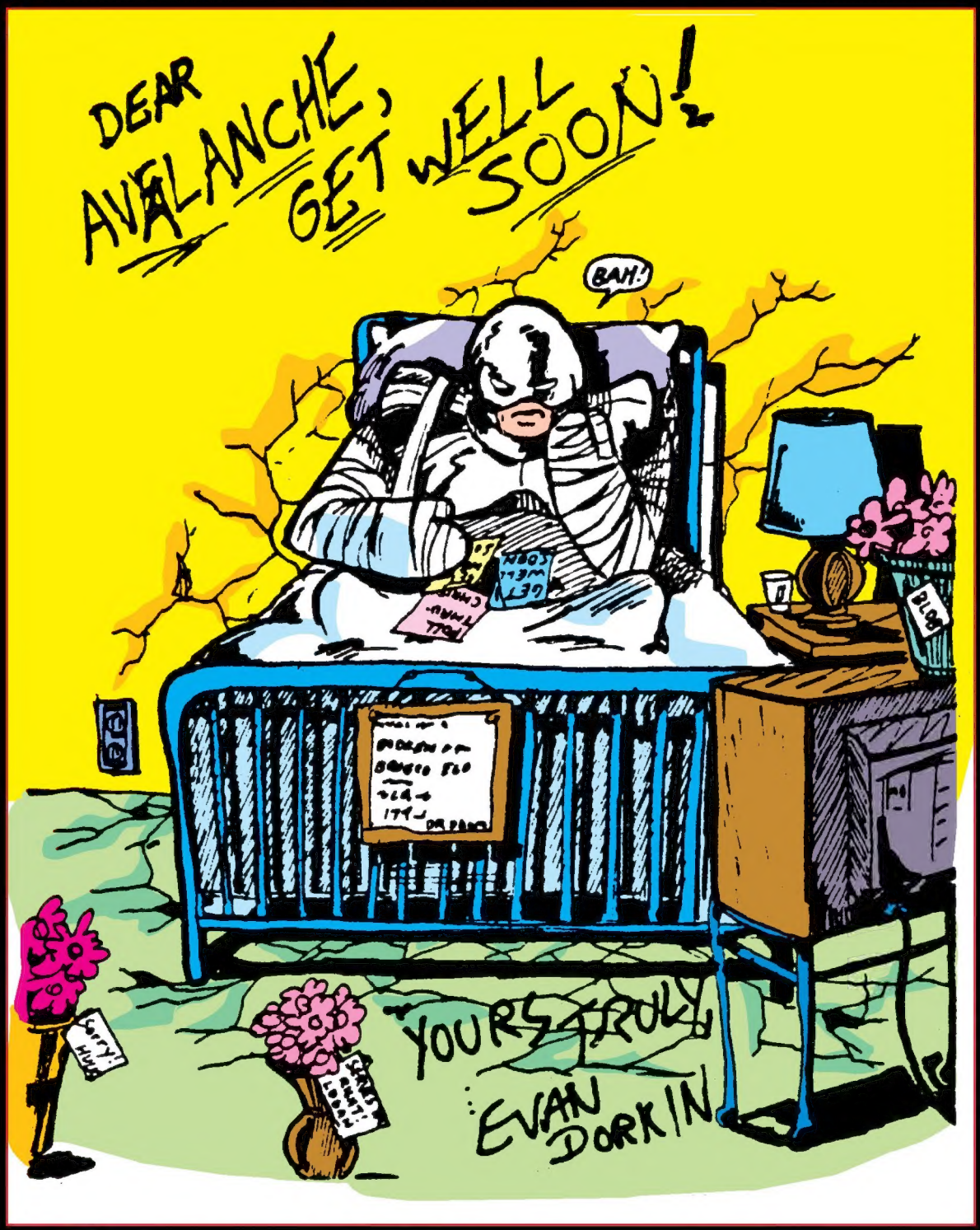
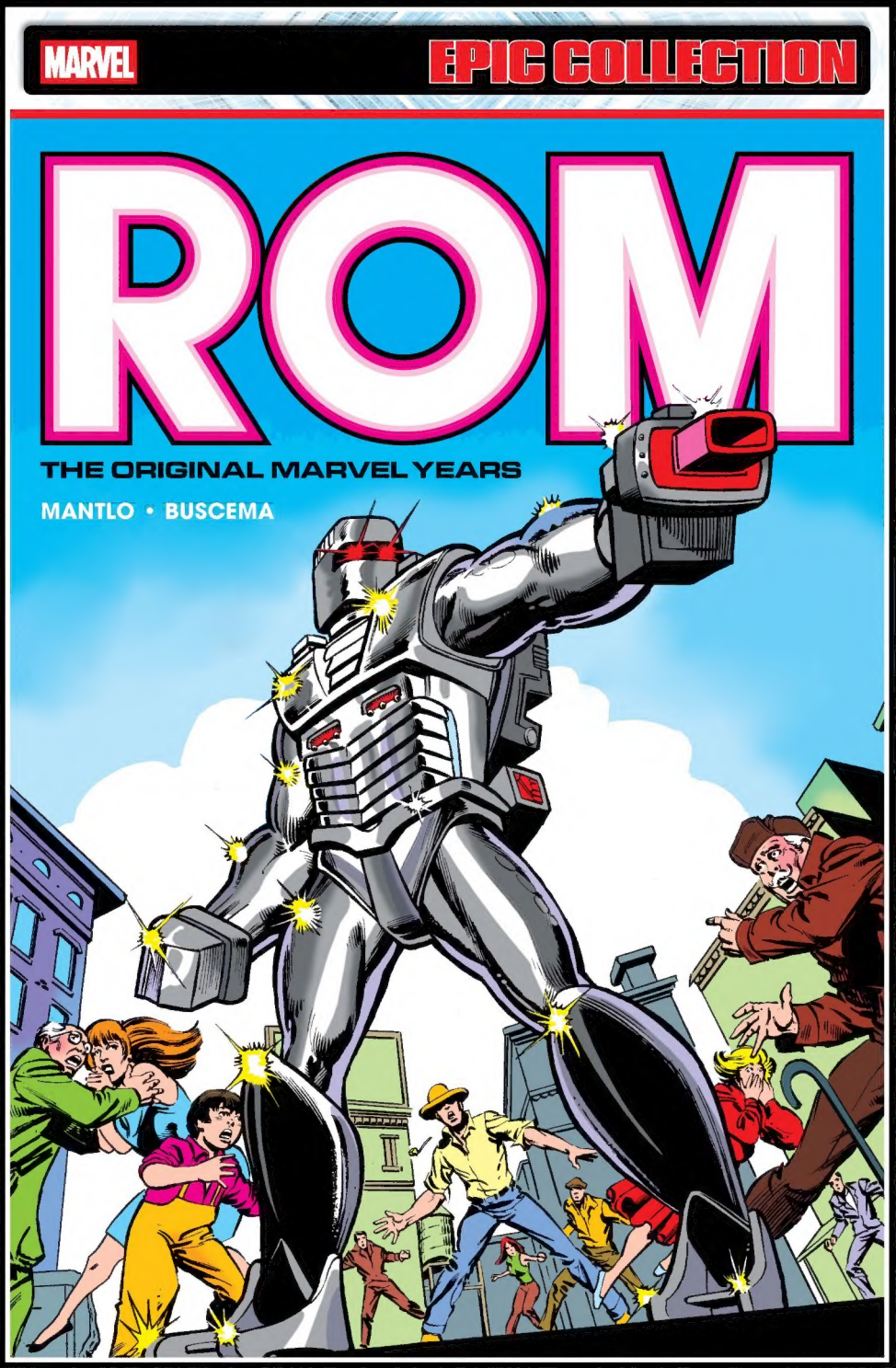


ROM #37 LETTERS-PAGE FAN ART BY FUTURE COMICS PROFESSIONAL EVAN DORKIN



ROM EPIC COLLECTION: THE ORIGINAL MARVEL YEARS VOL. 1 TPB
ISBN 978-1-302-96108-4

MICRONAUTS EPIC COLLECTION: THE ORIGINAL MARVEL YEARS — THEY CAME FROM INNER SPACE TPB
ISBN 978-1-302-96061-2

CONTINUING THE COMPLETE COLLECTION OF ROM'S CLASSIC MARVEL UNIVERSE ADVENTURES!

Rom collides with the hero called the Torpedo — but will he be an adversary or ally in the Spaceknight's relentless quest to rid Earth of Dire Wraiths? When his mission takes him to New York City, Rom faces Power Man and Iron Fist and has a strange encounter with the Fantastic Four! Then Rom heads home to Galador — and joins Nova in battle against the Skrulls! When he finally reaches his homeworld, Rom finds treachery awaiting him and his fellow Spaceknights. But that's nothing compared to the arrival of Galactus, intent on making Galador his next meal! And when Rom returns to Earth, he's joined by his golden compatriot Starshine! But for how long?

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VOLUME 2

1981-1982

MARVEL EPIC

T

ROM #21-33 & ANNUAL #1 AND POWER MAN AND IRON FIST #73